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Madame La Fleurie

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A Country Life

DONALD F. THEALL: Eliot's 'Coriolan'

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RUDOLPH VON ABELE: 'The Scarlet Letter': A Reading

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AUTUMN 1951

40 CENTS

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CONRAD RICHTER

Awarded the 1951 Pulitzer Prize for his novel, *The Town*.

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Awarded in 1951 the National Book Award for *The Auroras of Autumn* and the Poetry Society of America Gold Medal.

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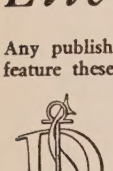

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ACCENT
A QUARTERLY OF NEW LITERATURE
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P. H. LOWREY:

A Country Life

When Miss Erin Ashby finished laying out her fresh clothes for the next day, she made sure in her mind that the breakfast table in the low-ceilinged puncheon-board kitchen was set and ready, and that she had put a clean flour sack over her single plate and silver. Then she turned out all the lights in her bedroom and went to sit in front of the coal-grate fire in the old fashioned front bedroom. She did not use the "big-bedroom" often for a living room — it was a waste of coal. But now she wanted to think, and the fire was big and bright. The big ormolu clock, with its two gold lion's heads roaring to either side, ticked comfortably on the mantlepiece, there between the grouped pictures of all her children and grandchildren, and in the stillness and warmth she could feel herself beginning to calm down, beginning to forget the terrible thing her son Isaac had said at the dinner table, just as though she were deaf as well as old. She could still see him sitting there, tall and thin and big-shouldered, his fork poised upside down over his plate, speaking with that quick leashed fury which was somehow in everything he did.

"Mama forgets she just don't remember anymore, she gets things all mixed up and makes up stuff."

And with the grandsons and Isaac's wife and Miss Sarah, all sitting there looking at their plates like she had done something to make them ashamed of her.

When she thought of it, the hot pain at the way Isaac had treated her since before Pearl Harbor even, welled up in her and made her mad, just mad, so that she wanted to stamp her feet and do something, anything, to show him. Instead she sat still in front of the fire, saying over and over again to herself, "Perhaps it is better to bear this, perhaps it is the Lord's will it shall be so." She tried to forget it. But she was humiliated and hurt by it. Her Isaac. To say such a thing! Deep within her, her love for him rebelled at her anger; at the table there had been nothing to do but put on her calm straight face and look at her hardly touched plate and bear it. She sat there at the big round table, trying not to let them see, acting as though Isaac had said nothing at all. She tried to put a little of Isaac's wife's potato salad, which was never much good, into her mouth, but she could not chew. Isaac, his mouth full and working hard, shoved the biscuit plate towards the three boys, their crew-cut heads as alike as peas.

"Eat sommore you guys, dammit, so you'll grow up. You wanta be *runts?*" he said, his brown eyes flashing at them in command. They each took a biscuit silently.

All that was not what really troubled her. Isaac's way disturbed her, yes; but what troubled her now was that she *did* seem to get confused sometimes — not things themselves, but the Time that surrounded the things, the Time in which they had happened. She could see everything in her mind's eye, the sharp clear faces speaking words and names, so many of them. But sometimes she could not say them, could not remember the order in which they had happened. It was all there, the bright remembered scenes, the faces laughing or in pain or still, the way the fields looked the day the buggy ran away and almost killed her, the clean timbery look of her new house a-building, right after she was married, the children tumbling about half-naked on quilts in the front yard or running under the big squat magnolias and tall cedars; the days and the nights and all the well-loved faces in every attitude, she could see all of it. And the calm brown face of Cindy, before she died; her husband's, Sam's face, laughing, ruddy, and very young and round, and then laid on top of that Sam's old face, lined and in great pain. All of it, all her life, lay for whole moments there before her in the quiet vista of her mind, like a bright slow-turning kaleidoscope, the images changing and sharp. But there was no Time connected with it at all. Time had been shoved together like Old Major Ashby's brass telescope, because there was so much important to remember that trying to fix it in Time was too much for her.

She enjoyed the peace of being here alone, before her own hearth in the warm, flickering fire-shadow, trying to piece things together and put them back into Time. Poor lonely Miss Sarah, in the north side of the house, had put out the coal-oil lamp she used to save electricity and gone to bed, so now there was only the stillness of her own big house around her, broken by the quiet sound of the decaying fire and the occasional ticking of cold wood in the walls.

Whenever she thought of Sarah's life, so dried up and bootless, without husband or children or anything at all except a few long-faced relatives who now would no longer even put up with an occasional visit from her, Miss Erin contemplated her own life with pleasure. Poor Sarah; Miss Erin had taken her in when the others deserted her, had rented her the north side of the house for half its worth. They got along. Though sometimes, even understanding, Miss Erin hated Sarah's niggardly ways, the whine of Sarah's self-pitying voice. "Please Erin, *could* you lend me just a *mite* of tea?" Or standing there in the bedroom door, like a beaten featherless bird, with the terrible child-like desire for invitation in her voice. "You've got a nice open fire in *here* tonight, haven't you?" She had nothing, nothing; no money or family or love at all, and Miss Erin always invited her in.

Here, alone before the fire, she could always lose the rushed, impossible feeling that keeping Isaac's boys, day after day, left her with. She sat quite erect, as always, in her cane-bottomed chair, her spotty, gnarled, man's hands lying quiet in her lap, one within the other, palms up, so that the poor twisted quilting finger got the good of the heat. It was cold for late February now, although the forsythia was already sending out its yellow signals all over the muddy spring land, and she had her chair close to the grateful warmth. Looking at the hot orange flame of the inner fire, the blue tongues licking slowly up over the black coal lumps, always made her peaceful and sleepy; she began to forget the humiliation at the dinner table. It made her think of herself too, made her dream on the puzzle of Time. She must try to remember it all, and put the faces back into Time, in order to come at the important meaning of it.

It was February and Cindy sat beside her, quiet and incredibly old in a starched white dress, smelling very clean and light and dry, like aged cedar, her cocoa-brown face calm and drawn and wrinkled like parchment under her white wool. Cindy used snuff, and occasionally rose gracefully to spit into the hot grate, as full of dignity and

manners as Sam's father, Old Major Ashby. Cindy sat quite still before the fire, not wishing to speak but to think back, to put her past life back into Time. She stared blankly into the fire, and when she spoke it startled Miss Erin.

"Cindy tiahed," she said in her firm musical voice. "Cindy life too long. Time for livin', Time for dyin', the Book say. Cindy very tiahed."

Now sometimes she found herself talking to Cindy again, and it did not seem incongruous when she became conscious of it, for she realized dimly that although Cindy had been dead some years, something brought them together again here by the fireplace. She had a vague presentiment that she would die when she had at last equalled Cindy's age, managed to make up the nineteen years which had always been between them. Cindy had raised her, had been there at the birth of each of her four children, had even been there at the birth of some of the grandchildren; Miss Erin could not remember a marriage or a funeral or a housewarming or an occasion of joy when Cindy had not been present. Cindy slid fleeting back and forth through all her life, and Miss Erin could never really feel that she was gone on anything more than a trip, from which she would one day return. She could never believe in the Cindy who lay, very peaceful and like a mummy, in the bed in Dochia's house, even though Cindy had said once that she would go home to her daughter's to die in the full spring, when the blossoms were out for her. In time she forgot Cindy's saying that, so that it came as a surprise when she was summoned to Dochia's cabin. Cindy had told her she wanted to go home to visit with Dochia's grown son; only when the boy came did she realize that Cindy had tricked her, had come home on purpose to die.

Dochia sat calm, already beginning to look a little like her mother, by the neat bed. She smiled.

"Come in Miss Erin. Mama say you come sit awhile after she gone." Dochia looked at her, only her eyes hurt, the rest of her face a composed and regal mask. She sat by Dochia's bed, looking at the newspapers tacked neatly all around the walls, with the colored pictures facing out, put there in layer after layer for warmth and for beauty. Cindy lay peacefully with her hands crossed on her dried body, graceful in repose. There were no sounds, only the penetrating stillness of hushed life, in honor of Cindy. From somewhere outside the soft and regular fall of an axe struck billets into kindling, as though muffled.

She had sat still by so many beds, by so many fires, in the cane

bottomed chairs; and how many years had that been, since she sat by Dochia's fire with Cindy? And now there was no peace but by the fire, and Isaac said, "Mama forgets she just don't remember, she makes up stuff." There was no Cindy to be here beside her, and she was afraid, afraid. Charles would never have said what Isaac said; he was a different kind of son. Charles would never have hurt her so.

Dochia nursed Charles. Miss Erin lay exhausted after the struggle with him, in the big front bedroom where she had her babies, and suddenly she was aware through the haze that hung before her eyes that Cindy was standing by the high walnut footboard, looking down at her.

"Hello Cindy," she said, and smiled weakly. "Is he pretty?"

"Ugly," Cindy said. "But he'll outgrown it. Only you ain't gonna give this one no bad milk. We ain't gonna lose this one at six weeks like we did Frederick. Dochia gonna nurse this one; I gonna take him over there now, so you be still. I be back. She got plenty milk for this one and her new one too, more beside."

"Oh Cindy," she said, and began to cry even though she didn't mean to, like a child. "I want to nurse him."

"Hush," Cindy said. "Gonna be enough trouble, without you actin' curious and peculiar on me. You got Lavinia to play with. I take care of this one."

Then Cindy smiled. Just with her eyes; her mouth was turned down hard in a scowl, but Miss Erin could tell.

"Ain't quite as ugly as mos' babies," Cindy said. "You done pretty good with him. He ain't hardly bruised a-tall."

Then Miss Erin smiled too and laughed a little. She felt so lazy, and she could hear Cindy calling the nigger boy to put the horse to the buggy for her. Cindy carried the baby loosely over one arm. as she would carry a flour sack. Then soon they went to see him, and she and Cindy sat with Dochia and the baby by the fire in Dochia's house. The fire which glowed on the orange brick and flicked its light onto the thickening newspapers on the walls, lending their humble grace to the room. Sat and smiled and made a fuss over him. Amid laughter.

Charles was like her family men, the O'Hare's, solid and big-boned, given to considering before he did a thing. She did not know why he had been the one to have accidents; when he was fourteen he broke both arms at once, leaping from a swing. And she could see Cindy, lugging his big body into the house after he fell off the smoke-house

roof, knocked unconscious. She screamed in fright to see his face, very white and a little bloody on one side.

And now it seemed to her all like one Time, even the last, when Cindy came back from town that day in the full heat of August. She was in the kitchen making biscuits for supper. Cindy had the yellow envelope in her hand; she stood stock still in the doorway, her brown face like a stone. Miss Erin knew even before the tears began to run slowly down Cindy's face, as though they were drops of water instead of crying. Cindy held out the envelope.

"I open it," she said. "We done lost him too, though we got him growed up."

Miss Erin sat down by the Ben Franklin stove before she looked at it, and she did not feel anything then. She could remember the smell of warm food cooking and the tangy, old smell of the kitchen, but she could not realize it then. Cindy still stood in the doorway, making no sound, with just the big drops of water running down her cheeks and falling off onto her starched dress, making dark tear-shaped marks there. It was from the mining company in the Philippines where Charles had gone to work, and she always saw the blue capital letters rising up, flying from the page to meet her.

> REGRET INFORM YOU CHARLES ASHBY IN ACCIDENT. HE DID NOT SUFFER. DEEPEST SYMPATHY. DETAILS FOLLOW, AWAIT INSTRUCTIONS INTERMENT.

Sam lost the store. Then he was working for the railroad, carrying convicts from place to place to work on the track. Cindy had already wired clean down to the other end of Mississippi to get him, and he came in the middle of the night. He walked in without a sound and held her close, just as he had in the old days, and patted her back. His eyes were red-rimmed and unsleeping and hurt, as they were after Frederick died and he started to drink. They went to the St. Louis World's Fair after Frederick, because Cindy thought it would do her good, and they brought back a little cup for Lavinia, of scarlet-and-white cut glass, that had "Lavinia, World's Fair, 1904" on it in thin Spencerian script. But now, after losing their money and the store, they could not have gone anywhere had they wanted to. Sam stood there, his face gray like putty, patting her quietly on the back.

"There, Erin," he said. "There. There." He did not seem to be able to say anything else, and she could feel him quivering slightly. It was she who had to cable the people in the Philippines to bury

Charles there. It seemed right, when she thought about it, that a part of her blood should extend once again westward into the world.

And oh, as she sat there now, staring into the fire, she knew it had only been the beginning of it, and for a moment she felt frantic with the pain of it, as though she had been pricked time and again with a needle. It seemed her life changed then; instead of the endless energetic days that had come with marrying Sam and living there and building for the whole town of Glasgow, Mississippi; getting subscriptions for the sidewalks when they were put in and planting and tending the lines of elm trees along the streets, keeping her cow and garden, raising the children and playing — instead of that, there was something new. Something happened. She had been unhappy before, it wasn't that. She had felt the pain of it all sometimes, but she was like a high-spirited little mare; when something happened she faced into it and did things rapidly, effectively, stamping her foot and laughing a lot, never letting anything get her down. She held herself up, the way her country mother taught her, and worked, bringing order and charm and wit to what she touched; she threw herself into her life. Even after Frederick died, even after Sam's farm failed and he bought the store and it did not go well and he began to drink. And she could see in the eyes of those she loved, her relations and friends, the farmers and townspeople, all that was necessary to keep her going. But with Charles, and then the depression, something changed, something new began.

Lavinia came home for a spell, all the way from Liverpool. Her husband was a cotton factor in Memphis first, and then was sent to Liverpool to open an office. She brought her children, more British than American, really, and it was not quite right. Sam chose that time to go off drunk, she did not know where, and did not return for three weeks. It was hard for her to sit with Lavinia and Cindy and try to be cheery, even though the children were fascinated with the newness of the country. They sat in the living room — opened especially for the occasion — and tried to talk. Lavinia asked interminable, rather too polite questions about all the people she knew, and sometimes Miss Erin caught her looking a little distastefully at the old furnishings in the rooms, at the bad oil paintings. She worried about Sam. Cindy knew it, but said nothing of it in front of Lavinia.

"It's just men," Cindy said quietly one night, while Lavinia was putting the children to bed. "Mr. Sam, he's an Ashby. Gentle*man. He gotta drink like a gentleman, grieve like a gentleman. I saw his*

poppa spoil him, back before he was courtin' you. Had his own little pony and a nigger boy to tote his gun for him; said then that boy gonna wind up drinkin' with a lotta wild country men. Never had no need to make his own way." Cindy's voice was calm and bitter. They seemed to do nothing much but sit by the fire and eat at regular times, drugged into silence and lack of feeling.

She bore up then, even after Sam lost the railroad job and spent his days sitting on the front porch, calling out in a tired voice to his friends passing, or sat for hours in the smoke-house door, getting redder and redder in the face and reaching behind the feed sacks every so often for something. Lavinia had gone back to England; there was no money. And Isaac, tall already at fourteen, watched his father always, his eyes smouldering and then beginning to burn with that intense white-hot glare that she had seen in Old Major Ashby's eyes. Having the last of her children there had been good for her, but she hated to see Isaac change. It was as though he got old very quickly. At eighteen, he was working, sometimes fifteen, eighteen hours a day, for the good-roads company, laying long hot stretches of concrete all over Mississippi and Louisiana and Arkansas, as though he had a kind of insatiable hunger for bodily fatigue. She experienced it too, those last two years of Isaac's growing up, when they watched silently, burningly, and there was nothing but the garden and a couple of hogs.

"Mr. Sam gonna kill himself," Cindy said. "He tryin' hard now."

Miss Erin flared. "Don't you say such a thing," she said, turning on Cindy in one of the few rages that ever came between them.

"No need bein' mad," Cindy said. "Cindy tell the truth. Even if you don't like it. Saw Old Major Ashby do it too, only he didn't do it slow dis way, wid liquor, but just got himself drunk good and put dat old white horse of his right off the channel creek bridge. I reckon he knowed that spring current never would give either one of 'em a chanct."

She shouted at Cindy then, mad, her fists clenched and her eyes blazing up. Cindy looked at her calmly.

"There," she said. "Cindy say too much. I wouldn't hurt you none, baby. Does make me mad though." Her face never showed anything at all.

And of course Cindy was right. Two years later it struck Sam like a sledge, all the rotten whiskey he had drunk. And for three days she had to sit, watching the intense pain that lined his face

quickly, but which he managed somehow to keep between his clenched teeth. It was strange; right at the last it was much as it had been in the beautiful years before, when he courted her.

They rode in the early spring mornings, before the light got deep. Sam drove the light-wheeled buggy with its fine team into the dark bottoms, where the almost mucky soil lay deep and black as coal around the cypress knees and the early dogwood laid out its flat branches like giant candelabra, with hundreds of cup-shaped blossoms glowing through the shadows to light your path. He turned his round boyish face to her and smiled easily.

"You're just like that dogwood, Erin," he said. It made her conscious of her own rosiness and health, her full but hard body and her thick black hair.

When the house was building, he teased her and made her laugh. She thought she would be content forever when the housewarming was breaking up, and Sam stood, laughing and excited, shouting goodbye to the guests and waving with his free arm, while the other circled her waist gently and held her to him.

Once when she sat there watching the pained face she hardly recognized, after he became almost delirious from the fire inside him, it was like that again, there was suddenly no Time between.

"You're sweet, you're like those dogwood blossoms, little Erin," he said. She burst into tears and went out of the room, running hard. She wept bitterly for an hour, with dry racking sobs because it was too much for her to bear up under.

Much later, after what seemed a Time unlike any of the others, the printed image of Sam's eyes dimmed in her mind and she smiled again and became herself. She did things quickly and laughed a lot. But something was changed. She felt the pricklings of her own mortality; it was as though it had been there in Sam's eyes for her to see.

Isaac's eyes burned intensely, always, even though they were dark brown. He bought a farm and worked for the good-roads and bought a house and pretty soon he became a druggist. And somehow he found time in between to drive, at sixty and seventy and eighty miles an hour, all over the country, from one town to another, as though he were lost, with a pint of whiskey in his hip pocket and a woman, always the same and yet always different, beside him. Everything he did he did hard. Sometimes at two and three and four o'clock in the morning he came home for a weekend or for a day. He came home

hard too; Miss Erin usually waked when she heard the tires squeal on the gravel a block away. And then almost immediately, Isaac would be stamping on the porch, bursting in the door. "Wake up dammit," he shouted, "wake up, I'm home!" He always caught her only halfway to the front door, hugging her and laughing. Then he stamped through the house, turning the lights on, beating with his fists on Miss Sarah's walls, shouting to her, too. "Wake up dammit Sarah, can't you tell I'm home." He always wanted coffee, and frequently they sat in the kitchen until full light, she and Sarah tired and blinking, in wrappers, with their hair in disorder, while Isaac drank coffee and talked and kidded them both, made them laugh. He was always off again, without sleep, to see someone. "You wanta go along with the boys, Sarah?" he said. She always blushed and did not know what to say. The telephone rang continually then; it was usually a woman's voice asking, "Is Horse there?" Miss Erin took some pleasure in replying that Isaac was not in, and she never offered to take a message.

And even that was changed now. Because he was settled and married, and lived so close that the excitement of it was gone. "Mama forgets things she makes up stuff. She don't really know how to handle the boys, but she does keep 'em all day." Though he was close now and saw her more often, in some ways the days before he married were better.

He came at nine o'clock one summer morning, moving with his long quick strides up the walk, dragging a plain round girl behind him.

"Mama, I'm married," he said very quietly, a little shy. "This is my wife, kiss her."

She knew it would be like this, but she was not braced for it and she cried foolishly, all at once.

"I'm sorry, Mama," he said finally. "I didn't think you'd want to be there with just a J.P. doin' the job." The girl stood there, and Miss Erin remembered she must welcome her. She tried hard, but they never liked each other. Before long Isaac was making a good deal of money and saving it, what with another farm and the new drugstore over in Ashford, five miles away. But his eyes always burned hot and dark, no matter what he was doing, as though he were lost and knew it.

Old Major Ashby's eyes were that way. Sam's eyes were not that way, but when she looked at Old Major Ashby, sitting his gaited white horse easily, one hand loose on the fingered reins, erect and tall as

though he and the horse were all of a piece, it made her afraid of him. She could tell now what it was she saw, though she could not have then; the death and chaos printed there in those hot eyes. His soul died sometime after the war, though his body kept on living again the hard-fought battles that had raged like fire through the calm bottoms and gentle hills; it was as though his eyes looked out at you blankly and were really turned inward to the scenes before, when the hard-bitten grey-clad men fell back slowly past the weathering big houses and fought from the angles of mud-and-log shacks. His eyes frightened her, and she was very respectful to him.

And oh, sitting there by the fire now, she felt the years sliding away all over again. Sliding away with the slow almost imperceptible sucking down and away of the generations, like the strong pull of an undertow beneath a swimmer's feet. The big house, so full of children's noise, was still now; the dining room, where Sam had insisted so often that guests have just one more piece of ham, was closed except for times like tonight. She went to the living room only to wind the big Seth Thomas clock with its oil paintings of elongated cranes on the front glass. She wanted to order her mind to the mournful ticking of her clocks, as Cindy did before her; she wanted to make a good neat end. She knew from Cindy's talk towards the last that Cindy's mind was straight and ordered, not jumbled as hers was now. Cindy would never have let Isaac talk to her as he had, she knew. Cindy controlled Isaac.

Cindy named Isaac, too. Miss Erin knew, even before she had him, some years after Charles, that he would be her last, the child of her old age. When the Doctor left, Cindy came and took her hand.

"Name this one for me, Erin," she said. "Cindy die soon, would like to have a man named Isaac in the house again, after my old man. I never asked that before, has I?" She paused and looked down. "Be good to have Isaac in the house again. An' it's a good Bible name."

It gave her a lot of pleasure to do it for Cindy. Because she always turned to Cindy, in time of trouble or of pleasure. When the cablegram about Charles came, she could not believe it was real, because there was the weekly letter from him right there, received the day before and hardly read the second time yet. But she looked at Cindy and saw it was true, and they stood there, looking at each other, neither of them speaking, thinking of all the life they had seen, the births and marriages and gay times, and each of them felt it, each of them saw the dust of the flesh. Then she had her arms around Cindy's

fragile back, and was crying hard into the starched white dress, crying for herself and Cindy too, and for all their dead. She felt then that something was wrong, that Fate had somehow played a hideous trick upon them.

"Are we to outlive them all, Cindy?" she cried, looking up into the brown steadfast face where the golden tears ran down in the firelight. "Are we to be left alone, with none of them at all? Are they all to go before us?"

"Lord give, and the Lord take away," Cindy said quietly. "Praise be the name of the Lord," but the tears coursed down her cheeks in silent golden streams.

From within her somewhere a strength to bear it had come; before long she was hard at work again. She never allowed the world to see her hurt; it was only when she sat before the fire that her breath caught fast and she gave a hurt, tired sigh. She smiled before the world and talked fast, and she kept the place up as best she could. She made dresses and quilts on private order and insisted that they be perfect, just as she insisted later that the WPA Sewing Room work she took be perfect. She never allowed herself to think, after Sam died and they had nothing in the depression, that she was too old to be working in the dingy, hot City Hall that had been converted for the ladies to sew in; nor did she complain, even though sometimes, after working all day and part of the evening, her quilting finger was so sore she could not sleep.

All that ran together in her mind so that she could see none of it distinctly. Later, the fact of the War and Isaac's going, a year after it began, struck her hard, but she was numb. The young men left very quietly and the War seemed so distant that it took time for her to realize that men were being killed. Then she was sure that Isaac, too, would die, and sometimes she sat in misery before the fire, crying slowly and silently, until the fear and hurt was too great and she forced herself to go to sleep.

But Isaac had, miraculously she thought, *not* been killed; he came home and was as he always had been. It made her happy, made her laugh at some of the things she had done in the strain of it.

The house got painted. The men were all gone off to fight or work, or labored the long hard hours necessary to keep the farms and places going. Her niggers had all gone north too, it seemed, but she was determined to get it done, so she walked twice all the way up the hill to Sam Elkins'.

"I just can't get around to it this month, Miss Erin," he told her both times. And then she got mad. She picked up the telephone and told him.

"You just order me the paint, Sam Elkins. It's ratty and ragged and I'll not have my house that way." Oh, she blistered him. "If you were half the man your father was, you'd be ashamed to let a woman sixty-eight, and a lady too, stand out on a ladder to paint her own house. But you just order me the paint and lend me the ladders."

They all tried to stop her; all the men she loved and knew, the same ones who brought her vegetables and meat during the depression, and sometimes took her out riding for her pleasure. But they were too busy to do much about it, or gone away, and she painted the outside slowly, doing some of the inside work when she felt too bad to climb the ladders. The only thing that came close to stopping her was a letter from Hollister, Cindy's grandson, written from Guadalcanal in a painful lead-pencil hand on V-Mail stationary. "Please Miss Erin," it said simply, "they sent word you was painting the house. Please stop. I will paint it later." She laughed long and hard at it and put it away among her treasured things, but she was almost finished by that time so she went ahead. Later, when she was resting up in bed, she wrote Hollister a long letter, thanking him for it.

And now it has all changed again, she thought. Hollister gone to Detroit and Isaac settled down to running a place of his own, with three little bullet-headed boys, and the town dying, almost dead. She could never accustom herself to the decay of the old main street, or the occasional burning of a deserted store, nor could she stomach the new cheap stores and buildings sprouting up along the new highway that ran east of town. Everything seemed to be changed; her dreams had gone somewhere, and it was not as she thought it would be at all. Not at all. "Mama just makes up stuff she forgets things." It was untrue; she remembered everything, she could, if she tried hard, put it all back into Time.

She roused herself, a little less tired and angry, and got up to read her daily Bible lesson from the Sunday school book, as well as the three chapters from the Book which she had set out for herself. She got up painfully, her hand hard on her right kidney, pressing, to help herself, giving a little grunt in straightening. Very carefully and slowly she read, so weary she could hardly see the page; with equal care she banked her bedroom fire and got to bed, knowing she would drop off quickly. She drew strength from thinking of Cindy before she slept.

But she knew it was Isaac as soon as she heard the tread on the front porch, although she did not know how long she had slept. She roused herself with an effort, hearing the door bang and then his clumsy tip-toeing in the front room.

"I'm not asleep, honey," she called. "Come on in. What is it?" She was sitting up by the time he flicked on the blinding light and pulled the chair over to the bed, although she could not seem to see him well. He was strangely quiet.

"In the movies I got to thinkin'," he said. "I got to thinkin' I didn't mean to hurt you tonight at the table. And that maybe keepin' the boys is too damned much for you. It's just me and Shirley workin' all day, we get tired and jumpy."

His hand was strangely gentle on her wrist. It made her feel very peaceful, so that she did not want to answer. She could not see him, but she knew he would be looking away, shy about his gentleness.

"Yes," she said. "Yes. No time." She could not seem to make her mind focus on what he had said; it insisted upon coursing far back, searching for something, something she could not touch.

"You sure?" Isaac said. "Dammit I don't want you workin' yourself to death. Those boys . . ."

"No, child," she said, hearing her own voice from a distance. "They're not too much. I'd be lost without the boys."

"You sure?" he demanded again. "I can't help sayin' things once in a while." He blundered on, trying to apologize.

"Yes," she said, and she felt very calm, very happy, but it was so difficult to hear him.

He came and kissed her before he went, bending over gently and just touching her forehead. She heard the echo of his footsteps and the car starting, and she settled back down into her big bed with a sigh, feeling the soft goodness of it all through her bones. The bright kaleidoscope of faces, the voices, the things she had loved and done kept passing before her eyes; but laid over the top of all the shifting, turning images, before she slept, was the image of Cindy, sitting starched and white and dry before the low fire, talking softly.

"Cindy tiahed," she said, looking down into the fire. "Cindy very tiahed."

WALLACE STEVENS:

Madame La Fleurie

Weight him down, O side-stars, with the great weightings
of the end.
Seal him there. He looked in a glass of the earth and thought
he lived in it.
Now, he brings all that he saw into the earth, to the
waiting parent.
His crisp knowledge is devoured by her, beneath
a dew.

Weight him, weight, weight him with the sleepiness
of the moon.
It was only a glass because he looked in it. It was
nothing he could be told.
It was a language he spoke, because he must, yet did
not know.
It was a page he had found in the handbook of heartbreak.

The black fugatos are strumming the blacknesses of
black. . .
The thick strings stutter the finial gutturals.
He does not lie there remembering the blue-jay,
say the jay.
His grief is that his mother should feed on
him, himself and what he saw,
In that distant chamber, a bearded queen, wicked
in her dead light.

DONALD F. THEALL:

Traditional Satire in Eliot's 'Coriolan'

Ulysses introduced a new genre and a new technique for treating the modern city as a labyrinthine mechanism; it indicated the means by which the "epiphanies" presented to the senses by city life could be fused into a vast, all-encompassing *peinture intérieure* — a mode adopted from the French symbolists, particularly Mallarmé. The creation of new forms based on modern cultural techniques resulted in the necessary rejection of the older literary forms for any serious poetry. "Littérature — c'est la banalité," Mallarmé declared, indicating that the symbolists' poetry was not literature in the professional academic sense. Eliot seems to be following this line in commenting on Joyce's work in *La Nouvelle Revue Francaise* when he points out that the success of *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* lies in the reduction of style and influences to zero. Eliot admits the debt he owes to Joyce's technique in the writing of *The Waste Land*. While Joyce has created a work that cannot be copied, there is much for the practitioner to gain from *Ulysses:*

> In using the myth, in manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity, Mr. Joyce is pursuing a method which others must pursue after him. They will not be imitators, any more than the scientist who uses the discoveries of an Einstein in pursuing his own, independent, further investigations. It is simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history. ("*Ulysses,* Order and Myth," *The Dial,* Nov., 1923.)

Joyce's technique employs a method of "double plot" — a paralleling of the "sordidly realistic" and the "phantasmagoric." Juxtaposition of the literal scene against the framework of a specific mythic situation (intensified by an overlayering of the mythic structure with expanding references or even secondary mythic sub-plots) produces the total work. Such technical detail demands close attention to the manner in which the senses are involved in mass cultural movements, if the totality is to be apprehended.

Eliot's "unfinished" *Coriolan,* overlooked by most critics, has such a structure, employing double plot on two levels: first, paralleling the

sordidly realistic with the phantasmagoric in "Triumphal March" and, secondly, juxtaposing what might be termed an heroic plot against a pastoral sub-plot in "Difficulties of a Statesman." The entire poem follows this pattern with its literal presentation of two aspects of modern government on the one hand illuminated by an analogy to Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* and on the other coupled with a sub-plot of a messianic coming resting on a series of situational echoes from Virgil, Dante and Isaiah.

The particular choice of the Coriolanus figure is tied up with a conception of the super-state as a phenomenon of emotional immaturity. Thus, the title, acting also as an epigraph, carries the double weight of indicating the concern of the poem — the Coriolanus as leader figure — and fixing a situation — the lack of moral substance in the mama's boy super-hero. The figure has been used before by Eliot in similar contexts. Coriolanus appears as a hero of adolescent appeal in "A Cooking Egg":

> I shall not want honour in heaven
> For I shall meet Sir Philip Sidney
> And have talk with Coriolanus
> And other heroes of that kidney.

Eagles and trumpets are missing from the heaven of the adolescent — the cooking egg embryo that will never develop — for there is no Messiah to herald. Coriolanus, as a figure of adolescent appeal, is himself a cooking egg, for his problem is that of an isolated man failing to find a mode of giving, sympathy, or control. Eliot uses this context in *The Waste Land:*

> *Dayadhvam:* I have heard the key
> Turn in the door once and turn once only
> We think of the key, each in his prison
> Thinking of the key each confirms a prison
> Only at nightfall, aethereal rumours
> Revive for a moment a broken Coriolanus.

Ugolino, damned to the last ring of the *Inferno* for treachery to his city, hears the key turn once only, locking him and his sons in a tower to starve — a death prepared for by his lack of sympathy for his city through treachery. The same arid egotism with the attendant lack of operational center leading to misplaced sympathy proceeds from Coriolanus' pride, resulting as with Ugolino in treachery and isolation. Likewise, the figure in this position in the Unreal City

cannot escape and at nightfall the thought of his position in the dream world only intensifies the sense that for him even adolescent heroics are ineffectual.

In *The Lion and the Fox,* Wyndham Lewis, whose work has always elicited Eliot's careful attention, emphasizes the adolescent aspect of Shakespeare's *Coriolanus.* In analyzing the crucial scene between Coriolanus and his mother, who has dominated his entire career, Lewis observes: "It shows Coriolanus as the rigid and hypnotized schoolboy influenced in his most susceptible years by a snobbish and violent parent and urged into a course of destruction which, the machine of an idea, he mesmerically pursues. . . ." Coriolanus cannot shift his behavior from its pre-conditioned patterning and hence is whirled away from his center of focus — his mother. The resulting catastrophe drives him into the complete isolation of exile. But Coriolanus never matures, as Lewis also emphasizes: "The scene to which this critical confrontation of the mother and son (III, ii) should be compared is the last scene of all, when he is killed by Aufidius and his followers. The word with which he is dismissed from the scene of this world is 'Boy' and he is shown as resenting it very much indeed."

Shakespeare's crowd, however, is presented no more favorably than his Coriolanus. Speeches of both the Tribunes (their representatives) and Menenius (their antagonist) reveal the essential immaturity underlying the crowd's outward fickleness. Menenius' stomach metaphor slants the entire position of the crowd as dependent, in a crudely paternalistic way, upon the aristocracy. This aspect of the totalitarian state as mass infantilism is suggested by a passage in Eliot:

> The identity of religion and culture remains on the unconscious level, upon which we have superimposed a conscious structure wherein religion and culture are contrasted and can be opposed. The *meaning* of the terms "religion" and "culture" is of course altered between these two levels. To the unconscious level we constantly tend to revert, as we find consciousness an excessive burden; and the tendency towards reversion may explain the powerful attraction which totalitarian philosophy and practice can exert upon humanity. Totalitarianism appeals to the desire to return to the womb. The contrast between religion and culture imposes a strain: we escape from this strain by attempting to revert to an identity of religion and culture which prevailed at a more primitive stage; as when we indulge in alcohol as an anodyne, we consciously seek unconsciousness. *(Notes Towards a Definition of Culture.)*

The integration of Eliot's poem about the play *Coriolanus* also implies the other aspect of *Coriolan,* for it is a two-faceted symbol. Juxtaposition in the two sections of the poem of the alternating triumph and fall of the Shakespeare hero provides an ideogram consisting of the two poles of government — the totalitarian-religious in "Triumphal March" (Caius Martius as conqueror) imposed against the democratic-cultural in "Difficulties of a Statesman" (Caius as consul). The rulers of the democratic city performing their actions are the same type of mob as that which banishes Caius. Again Eliot's prose provides an enlightening comment:

> . . . the tendency of unlimited industrialism is to create bodies of men and women — of all classes — detached from tradition, alienated from religion, and susceptible to mass suggestion: in other words, a mob. And a mob will be no less a mob if it is well fed, well clothed, well housed, and well disciplined. *(Ibid.)*

Even in overall scheme the poem is constructed ideographically, the democratic mob posed against the totalitarian — the city where the cry is an hypnotic "Heil" against the city whose cry is hysterical because undirected. The use of Shakespeare's play as a basic parallel is similar to Joyce's use of the *Odyssey* — the play provides the poem with a dramatic situation which fits the "whole of feeling" about which the poem is integrated.

The movement and imagery of *Coriolan* seem from the first to indicate an under-plot, for they suggest the imminence of some apocalyptic event. Eagles, trumpets, the dove, the palm, many crowding the way to the temple are all reminiscent of the images in the Messianic books of the Old Testament, perhaps most specifically Isaiah. An actual quotation from this book appears at the opening of "Difficulties of a Statesman" to "fix" the situation setting of the sub-plot. The echoes from Isaiah stand not only as parody on the hero figure, who fails to be the fulfillment of the messianic prophecy, but also on the cities themselves as related to the prophecies foretelling the destruction of the earthly cities.

The technique, as in Eliot's other poetry, illustrates the doctrine of poetic borrowing expressed in his study of Massinger ("The good poet welds his theft into a whole of feeling, which is unique, utterly different from that from which it was torn. . . . A good poet will usually borrow from authors remote in time or alien in language or diverse in interest"). Illumination is cast on the use of Shakespeare and

the Bible as points of reference, as well as enrichment of the poem in its "traditional" content. Borrowing does not stop at this point, however. The panoramic images of "Triumphal March" are basically derived from Charles Maurras' *L'Avenir de l'Intelligence:*

> "Y avez-vous pris garde?" dit-il, les yeux serrés, "le chef de l'état s'était fait représenter. Nous avions la moitié du conseil des ministres et les deux préfets. *Tant de généraux! Des régiments avec drapeau, des musiciens* et *leur bannière.* Sans compter *beaucoup de magistrats en hermine* et de professeurs, ces derniers sans leur toge, ce qui malheureux. *—Et les soldats faisaient la haie? Ils la faisaient* —En armes?—Vous l'avez dit.—Mais que disait le peuple?—il n'en croyant pas ses cents yeux!" (Italics mine to indicate specific borrowings.)

Eliot has fused elements together to achieve a new "whole of feeling." This is accomplished by the Joycean technique of using language, images and sound to evoke a mythical structure paralleling the primary movement of feeling and thought. The "borrowing" is either remote or alien, although the technique of vision is similar to that used by Joyce.

"Triumphal March" demonstrates a debt to Dante deeper than mere borrowing. As regards Dante's technique of imagery, Eliot has stated: "Dante's attempt is to make us see what he saw. He therefore employs very simple language and very few metaphors. . . . And there is a peculiarity about his *comparisons* which is worth noticing in passing." Eliot's language in *Coriolan,* like Dante's, is simple and idiomatic; the images are precise and the comparisons part of the modern Inferno. As with Dante, the auditory is fused inseparably with the images. From the opening note, the "music" is important:

> Stone, bronze, stone, steel, stone, oakleaves horses' heels
> Over the paving.

This opening gesture evokes comparison with the opening of the Siren's section of *Ulysses* which is significantly related to the organ of hearing:

> BRONZE BY GOLD HEARD THE HOOFIRONS, STEELYRINGING
> Imperthnthn thnthnthn.
> Chips, picking chips off rocky thumbnail, chips.
> Horrid! And gold flushed more.
> A husky fifenote blew.
> Blew. Blue bloom is on the
> Gold pinnacled hair.

Joyce here blends the "mechanics" of the "labyrinth," the city, with the auditory theme of the concert room, contrasting and relating the auditory effect. The pseudo-Messianic Bloom is juxtaposed against the vice-regal procession in this movement. Following this, in the tavern scene, Joyce uses catalogue descriptions in relation to the body politic culminating in Bloom's flight from the citizens. Eliot, too, in *Coriolan,* places royalty against a Messianic parody supplementing the structure of the mythic section deriving from *Coriolanus* a sub-stratum of images from Isaiah. The primary emphasis, however, is on a union of the auditory and visual elements of the various discontinuous processions. In a similar manner, Eliot's use of melopoeia in the "March" fused to phanopoeia indicates the double-barreled mob appeal of the super-hero's pageant. The demands made on these senses are analogous to the two-fold perception of the crowd with which the tempo of the march gradually fuses to become the tempo of the city:

> And the flags. And the trumpets. And so
> many eagles.
> How many? Count them. And such a press
> of people.

As in the Shakespearean procession, "The oaken garland" of military success and the "trumpets" mark the procession of victory (II,i,181 ff.) for the crowd to observe. Hence, too, the sensible appeal is underlined by the tribune's statement:

> Let us carry eares and eyes for the time.(II,i,288)

Eliot's Unreal City has its mythical counterpart in Rome, Elizabethan London and Jerusalem, but its "dream" quality is emphasized:

> We hardly knew ourselves that day,
> the city.

for the tempo and the spectacle have lowered the men to an unreality of mechanical perceptions, both visual and auditory. The "sound effects" build up until the actual sight of the procession. Only two interposed lines of alert awareness deliberately emphasized, break the pattern momentarily:

> The natural wakeful life of our Ego is a perceiving
> We can wait with our stools and our sausages.

As a response to the question "Is he coming?" the "Ego" blends with the hero figure in this machine state, where the crowd's perceptions are absorbed into the mechanical tempo. The crowd waiting becomes by symbolic juxtaposition the "bowels" of the city, an image which Coriolanus applies to the mass of Romans. The city, then, for Eliot, as with Joyce, is a physical organism, a labyrinth (perhaps paralleling Menenius' stomach metaphor in *Coriolanus*).

As the tempo reaches its peak, the pageant appears. The ear has fully prepared the eye to accept the mass of mechanical equipment culminating in the appearance of "now 50,000 army waggons,/ 11,000 field kitchens/ 1,150 field bakeries" which continue the "stools" and "sausages" theme — the necessary operational processes of the human machine. The temporal emphasis introduces the appearance of the bureaucracy, the leader's new priesthood:

> What a time that took. Will it be he now? No,
> Those are the golf club captains, these the Scouts,
> And now come the Mayor and the Liverymen.
> Look
> There he is now, look:

Relief is not given following the catalogue of equipment, for the mechanism of the army is followed by the political machine needed to operate the state. Time is introduced in a mechanical sense with the sound pattern emphasizing the length of the preceding visual catalogue and preparing for the political contingent's waddling movement. The cry of "look" breaks the sequence of the second catalogue calling attention to the crowd "eyeing" the leader (cf. *Coriolanus,* V,iii,75).

From the "eyes" of the crowd the focus shifts to a close-up of the leader:

> There is no interrogation in his eyes
> Or in the hands, quiet over the horse's neck,
> And the eyes watchful, waiting, perceiving, indifferent.

"Eyes" and "hands" react symbolically to create a scene of mechanical precision which stills the entire atmosphere. Repetition of "eyes" immediately expands the aura of association. Coupled with the "hidden" of the next line and the triumphal march, there is certainly an ironic suggestion of the Terrestrial Paradise, where at the culmination

of the procession Beatrice's eyes are "hidden" from Dante. This suggestion is expanded in the next three lines of lyric movement:

> O hidden under the dove's wing, hidden in the
> turtle's breast,
> Under the palmtree at noon, under the running
> water
> At the still point of the turning world. O hidden.

The symbols can be interpreted literally to apply to the dictator's dress, as perhaps illustrated by the surface impressiveness of Mussolini, a mock saint-artist, but the force of the "eyes" and the symbols lead us further. They, also, suggest Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* (reference to the "dove," "palm," and "running water" are central in both works). More centrally, as in Isaiah, they are theological symbols — the "dove," the Holy Spirit, the "palmtree at noon" and the "running water," Christ in the sacraments of the Eucharist and Baptism, and the "still point," the Unmoved Mover — the Trinity, which Beatrice's "eyes" as the light of theology opened to Dante. Hence, the center of the universe is ironically opposed to the purely material center of the dictator-hero.

"Difficulties of a Statesman" moves along a parallel line of development up to this point. First, the society as a whole is presented with the emphasis on its lack of a strong focus. Instead of the "eagles" and "trumpets," the shouts of victory and the thud of the troops, the quotation from Isaiah indicates dilemma, "What shall I cry?" in contrast with the directed cheers of the totalitarian mob. Here, too, the motif of success is present. An aural mocking of this motif is suggested in the lined "Cavaliers/O Cavaliers" paralleling Walt Whitman's poem "Pioneers, O Pioneers." The machinery of the state is introduced — committees and commissions with over-laying secretariat — paralleling the catalogue of petty government officials in "Triumphal March." The "hero" appears to the refrain "What shall I cry?" Arthur Edward Cyril Parker, as telephone operator, is the "savior" of this state as the name indicates: from their original roots the names suggest salvation (Arthur of the Arthurian legend), guardian of riches (Edward from the Anglo-Saxon *ead-warde),* Lord (Cyril from Greek *kyrie)* and protector of public lands (Parker). It is the mechanism of the telephone switchboard that forms the crux of this body politic and carries suggestions of an extreme abnegation of personality. One modern commentator has pointed out that "The telephone is considered by many Europeans, on grounds other than religious, as a

diabolic invention, inasmuch as it implies a negation of personality." In *Finnegans Wake* the telephone switchboard also appears in such a context. The salary quotation further ties the theme of salvation to an economic motif and the abnegation of man's personality resulting from mechanization.

The movement in "Difficulties of a Statesman" is linked to "Triumphal March" by many echoes. Volscians, "Roman busts" and the "mother" cry are all aspects of the *Coriolanus* movement, while the references to Isaiah, the theme of rising and falling at the conclusion, and the repetition of the "still point" motif continue the counter-pattern of the false Messiah. Here, however, the structure is also expanded by the introduction of the *Georgics*. The attitude of Virgil in the *Georgics* towards Rome and the wars of Caesar parallels the situational framework of Eliot's analysis of industrial urbanity and militarism. Virgil indicates the lack of amenity in Rome by presenting what it feels like to live in an agrarian society, a point already noted by Eliot ("The Social Function of the Poet"). In a similar manner, the *Coriolan* poems indicate what it feels like to live in an urban city. The precise reference to Virgil transferred to the city intensifies the irony:

> Meanwhile the guards shake dice on the marshes.
> *And the frogs (O Mantuan) croak in the marshes.*
> *Fireflies flare against the faint sheet lightning.*
> What shall I cry?
> Mother mother
> Here is the row of family portraits, dingy busts, all
> looking remarkably Roman,
> Remarkably like each other, lit up successively by
> the flare
> Of a sweaty torchbearer, . . .
> (Italics mine)

The two italicized lines are based on the first book of the *Georgics,* where they appear as signs of warning before storms. Here, too, are echoes from "The Journey of the Magi" and *The Waste Land* of the passion and crucifixion -- the guards casting dice and the sweaty torchbearer in the garden — they add another nuance to the sub-plot as well as a cubist perspective of earthly cities that have fallen.

The "hidden" theme at this point is linked to natural fertility symbols, continuing the suggestion of the Virgilian pastoral setting as a counter-movement. At the "still moment," identical with the "still point," — a space-time cluster — the "cyclamen spreads its wings, there the clematis droops over the lintel." These flowers, colloquially

termed the "sow's beard" and the "virgin's bower," carry a suggestion of phallic fertility — traditional associations in the Celtic legend of the White Goddess and the Sow. This sets up another movement to the temple, but as with the virgins of the first section, here, too, the ritual is empty. In the first section, the urns contained "dust"; here the incestuous political orientation suggested in the mother-symbol (Oedipus reigns over a waste land), perverts the quality of love and the sacrifice is described as:

> Mother
> May we not be some time, almost now, together,
> If the mactations, immolations, oblations, impetrations,
> Are now observed.

The "mactations, etc. . . ." are tied up with the emptiness of the "tired head" but strong neck and nose of mechanized man. Aurally, the suggestion is intensified by the "-ation" ending of the sacrificial terms, for by linguistic analogy modern journalese has managed to render these terms mechanical and fixed. There is some suggestion that the pattern of an organic body politic could be traced through *Coriolan* — the "intestine" image of the first section linked with the head, neck and "Noses strong to break the wind" of the latter movement. These grotesque aspects of the poem's vision stand in the satiric tradition of Skelton, Rabelais and Swift.

More central, however, to the complete integration of the poem is its use of melodic and visual motifs. The melodic theme with its counterpoint of rhythms — mechanical and lyrical — parallels the panorama of visual images which affect us through the device of repetition. The melodic patterns indicate certain key words, such as "stone," "bronze," "steel," "hidden," "mother," "dust," and "light" from which the totality of the poem derives its meaning. The technique is one first suggested by Mallarmé and then Valéry. In *Variété V,* Valéry points out the ascending tones of meaning that are taken on by the re-echoing of the word *light* in one's mind after a simple question such as "Give me a light?" Poetically this has been employed by Mallarmé with the word "pénultième" in *Le Démon de l'Analogie.* Each repetition frees the image from its immediate physical situation to suggest its full vibrations in the community of essence in which it partakes. Here, in the opening, this technique is established with "Stone, bronze, stone, steel" repeated again at the close. Stone, for example, suggests the material construction of the

city — its solidity — as well as all man's purely material artefacts, whether the bronze of memorial or the steel of war equipment, and the foundations of the city. The auras of suggestion are naturally manifold and defy a prose exegesis, just as the charge of the word "light" repeated over and over again in the mind defies a purely mechanical enumeration. "Mother" emanates from the Coriolanus situation and its Oedipal over-tones in the second section where the mob is in search of some warm, sustaining womb such as a Buick or television-equipped modern living room.

Dust and light provide the crux of the poem. Dust as the "signature of being" in its traditional mythological contexts is the means to "light." A Mallarméan doctrine even suggests that it is through dust particles that light is perceived. The suggestions here imply a metaphysical conflict between the dust and the light which resides in all of the many mental linkages that occur half-consciously. These images dominate each concluding section. Differences arise only in the mode of expression that is proper to the apparent center of each city — either the dictator's army or the constellation of committees. Both conclusions re-emphasize a now meaningless ritual. The first, in the Cyril incident (the pun again on the Greek):

> (And Easter Day, we didn't get to the country
> So we took young Cyril to church. And they rang a bell
> And he said right out loud, *crumpets.*)
> Don't throw away that sausage
> It'll come in handy. He's artful . . .

Emphasis falls on the reduction of the spiritual to the material: the bell has come to signify nothing further than the "crumpet" man who now rings an identical bell in the streets — originally a mockery of the bell which preceded The Host when carried in the street. This connects with the "sausage" motif and the necessary emphasis on "artfulness" and "handy," for a clever mechanicality is valued more than a true artistic creativity by such a society. In the latter section this theme is reiterated more briefly:

> O Mother
> What shall I cry?
> We demand a committee, a representative
> committee, a committee of investigation.

The "cry," as the ritual of the first part, shifts from any possible focus of true love to a mere adolescent hysteria demanding more complex

machinery in which to be enfolded. The light and dust of the first section appear again:

> Hidden in the stillness of noon, in the silent croaking night.
> Come with the sweep of the little bat's wing, with the small flare of the firefly or lightning bug,
> "Rising and falling, crowned with dust," the small creatures,
> The small creatures chirp thinly through the dust, through the night.

with the emphasis on the rising and falling pattern of earthly cities. In "Difficulties of a Statesman," the committees, the pseudo-order of the bureaucratic state, performs just as abortive a function as the soldiers' bayonets — the false hierarchy of totalitarian power:

> *Et les soldats faisaient la haie? ILS LA FAISAIENT.*

The line from Maurras' *L'Avenir de l'Intelligence* is an appropriate conclusion, with the bayonets both refracting the light and cutting it off. (Both implications are contained in the pun on *"haie"* — meaning rank or hedge.) In "Difficulties of a Statesman," the "RESIGN, RESIGN, RESIGN" paralleling "Light, Light, Light" has an identical two-edged function suggesting many possible courses of human action.

In such a focus, the *Coriolan* poems stand in the tradition of More, Swift, Rabelais, and other satirical treatments of man's government. The twin poems are closest, however, as is most of Eliot's later poetry, to the works of Joyce, who also occupies a central place in this satiric tradition. The *Coriolan* poems are not, as supposed by many misled through involuntary participation in these same phenomena of "power" and "mass communication," suggestive of a preference for any political doctrine — totalitarian or democratic — but a presentation of a state of mind that has become part of modern civilization. Another typical Joycean pattern appears in the twin structuring of the poems along societal lines — a conception carried into literature from anthropological research of the twenties — providing an additional element of tension and condensation. The apparent contrasting of the patrilineal dictatorship and the matrilineal democracy partially resolves itself in the irony that the totalitarian state is itself mother-centered, for the hero-figure is viewed in terms of a sustaining womb symbol. It is interesting to note in this respect that Coriolanus, though

a conqueror and ruler of men, failed to achieve his success owing to the fact that he was himself a mother-centered adolescent. H. M. McLuhan's *The Mechanical Bride: Folklore of Industrial Man* clearly delineates these patterns in modern culture suggesting that the matrilineal centered democracy and the paternalistic totalitarianism are inextricably intermingled in modern culture. This book, based on the principle of the aesthetic analysis of the state as an object, provides much to elucidate this modern satire. Eliot's poem, using these materials, has dealt with a contemporary state of mind. Rather than making value judgments, it teaches by illuminating, transfiguring and epiphanizing the object under consideration. As such, it deals in analogies arising in the community of existence in which all men participate. It is through the realization of this common participation that the poem communicates itself to the individual reader.

HAROLD V. WITT

Metaphor for Christ's Birthday

Apropos, a misfit dragonfly
late hatched, diaphanous freak,
from mossy festering sink
under the torn pondlily,
home of lewd toads, arose—
gauze-winged eccentric
on December air, almost
flawed it was so cold.
Trees turned sapphire, and birds
froze, booming like stones.
This one, however, daring hoar,
adventured everywhere,
flimsily soaring
through solid atmosphere
until crucified on web
like any fly
and never heard the news
of abnormality.

BYRON VAZAKAS:

Bivouac

Walt Whitman seeks no mountaintop;
but on this midnight battle-
field finds peace, finds
comfort by his comrade's side.

The guns are toppled, and the drums
are stilled. Death stilled
an ambiguity. The dead boy
rested in a friend's embrace.

It seemed that someone's arms
encompassed him beyond this
life, his pain, beyond a
parentage. Persistent as

Another's choice, a nearby stream
continues on. Wind wavers
weeds; the leafage stirs;
and shadows hide the hunted

Heart. Now, even trees conform
to night, unless some cloud-
reflected fire unbinds the
branches from the dark.

Walt gazes at the silent youth.
His tenderness is unrebuked;
his nightlong vigil unremarked.
In death, possession is his

Own; and love his private privilege.
As shy as halftones in the
shade, his hands reach out
to touch the hands that seem

Withdrawn. He learns that love
and death unite. For him,
at least, his need is real,
desire ecstatic as its dreams,

The mind and body reconciled. Gone
are betrayals, and gone their
opportunity. Walt ardently
composes warmth around the

Body of his friend. But bodies
are war's numerals, a use, a
tag, a disembodied act. And
yet, each body, in desire,

Is someone's wish, unique and
beautiful. Walt winds the
blankets like a shroud. His
hands invent mythologies,

Too soon, too secret, or too late.
He pleads an antique politics,
a poet of democracy, Walt
Whitman, candidate for love.

JOSEPH LANGLAND:

Fall of Icarus: Brueghel

Flashing through falling sunlight
a frantic leg late plunging from its strange
communicating moment
flutters in shadowy waves.

Close by those shattered waters—
the spray, no doubt, struck shore—
one dreamless shepherd and his old sheep dog
define outrageous patience
propped on staff and haunches,
intent on nothing, backs bowed against the sea,
while the slow flocks of sheep gnaw on the grass-thin coast.
Crouched in crimson homespun an indifferent peasant
guides his blunt plow through gravelled ground,
cutting flat furrows hugging this hump of land.
One partridge sits immobile on its bough
watching a Flemish fisherman pursue
fish in the darkening bay;
their stillness mocks rude ripples rising and circling in.

Yet that was a stunning greeting
for any old angler, peasant, or the grand ship's captain,
though sent by a mere boy
bewildered in the gravitational air,
flashing his wild white arms at the impassive sea-drowned sun.

Now only coastal winds
ruffle the partridge feathers,
muting the soft ripping of sheep cropping,
the heavy whisper
of furrows falling, ship cleaving,
water lapping.

Lulled in the loose furl and hum of infamous folly,
darkly, how silently, the cold sea suckles him.

HAROLD NORSE:

Brueghel

The clock ticks at the exhausted peasant
sprawled, priapic on the wall,
by the thick wheat under the tree
—that Brueghel, bowdlerized, of course,
made decent while he snores!—
codpiece painted on (in green)
the phallus of his feudal dream.

The limbs lie, thicker than the wheat,
open and free; in the foreground,
moving with *Angst* and indolence,
his face chrome yellow—and almost mud
with weariness, and too much earth—
a peasant youth carries a jug
of nothing through a yellow sea
parting like the Red Sea. But he
may be bearing water or wine;
no one is hailing; no one cares.

Why, then, of all that animal mass
of snoring or of sucking flesh
is he the agent of despair
bigger than all that weight of furry earth
or greenish air, or squirming tree?
The clock ticks on the mantelpiece;
the icebox ticks into the pan.
Summer moths are dying in
the blades of an electric fan.

RUDOLPH VON ABELE:

The 'Scarlet Letter': A Reading

I

Less than is the case with any of Hawthorne's other fictions, *The Scarlet Letter* is a flawed book, one about which we are enthusiastic with qualifications of the sort that absent themselves when *L'Education Sentimentale,* or *Fathers and Children,* or even *A Portrait of the Artist* comes under scrutiny. With respect to these, Hawthorne's is surely a *minor* masterpiece, yet it belongs in their general class: it is the only *novel* he wrote, and one of the few produced in nineteenth-century America. For this reason precisely the flaws are important: they tend to vitiate the book as a novel, while, were it cast simply as what Graham Greene aptly denominates "entertainment," they would be unimportant. Hawthorne — for what reason is an entirely too complex matter to handle summarily — was consistently unable to objectify his themes without resorting to the importation of "machinery" of some kind, as an allegorical makeshift for handling aspects of the theme which his purely novelistic techniques were too inadequate to cope with. The "gothic" paraphernalia (occultism, castles, blood, dark men, mysterious crimes, wizards, elixirs and potions) and the allegories that pepper his work form the chief "machines." Both fail far more often than they succeed. As for the former, it is the more immediately reprehensible, because one feels sure that Hawthorne cannot himself have believed in it (the desperate irony with which he invoked it in the hysterical drafts of his unfinished "romances" of 1860-1864, recently published, only confirms this) — while at the same time one feels that it served a purpose Hawthorne was incapable of serving in some more satisfactory way: of providing an "external" circumlocution of certain psychological states, such as guilt or horror or even, one suspects, of obsessional neuroses.

And with reference to allegory, it fails too often because it is based upon the belief, which was almost Hawthorne's sole link with transcendentalism, that "natural facts are signs of spiritual facts," which in turn may be run back to the Puritan propensity for "interpreting" secular events as indicators of the absolute status of souls. In such a view, it becomes a standing temptation to the artist to select

a symbol solely in terms of its stipulated ability to figure some "spiritual" concept, state, or truth, neglecting its suitability within the context of the work at a purely naturalist level. The symbol, that is, possessing no meaning at the naturalist level, makes its appearance very much like a "visitor from another world," creating an incongruity which, being unpremeditated, tends to destroy reciprocally both the symbol as symbol and the context surrounding it. The effect is often, in fact, unintentionally humorous, as in "Egotism: or the Bosom Serpent," perhaps the worst of all these instances in Hawthorne's writing, or else simply factitious, as in the incident of the withered bough in "Roger Malvin's Burial." It is an easy "way out" of the problems of symbolism — stemming partly perhaps from Hawthorne's penchant for thinking up abstract ideas and later trying to find the situations and symbols which would lead readers to them. As a method, perhaps its chief pitfall is the necessity it imposes upon the artist of building a maze with but *one possible* path to the center — of, in other words, "rigging" his book so that it cannot be misread, much as the composer of "program" music is obliged to do, with equal unsuccess. An irresistible impulse, it is also an impossible one to fulfill: and just as lawmakers who try to write laws that are mythically foolproof produce one loophole after another, so the artist in trying to make his book symbolize one and only one abstraction succeeds only in producing a host of unintentional ambiguities. Or else, once in a while, he nearly succeeds, and saddles us with, not a work of art, but a didactic parable — inasmuch as all art which represents an effort at oversimplification cannot avoid didacticism.

Insofar as *The Scarlet Letter* succeeds, it is because Hawthorne for once sidestepped the perils of his habitual method; insofar as it is imperfect in success, it is because he missed his footing. It has perhaps not been yet *fully* recognized that the book displays at the textural level a coherence and homogeneity which contribute substantially to, if they do not actually supply, the thematic coherence for which it has generally been celebrated. The success exists because the whole book, taken point by point, has become a symbolic vehicle — because, that is, the symbolism does not stand in isolation as a kind of chef d'oeuvre round which the pattern of events is grouped like a family circle round the patriarch, in ostentatious obsequiousness, but because the symbolism cannot itself be said to exist *except* as it emerges step by step through the texture of the novel. It may be worth while to endeavor an analysis of the book, first in terms of its wider thematic concerns, and second

in terms of the elucidation of those concerns by a study of their emergence in the book's detail, particularly in its rhetoric. In this way both success and qualifications may become clearer than they usually are in Hawthorne criticism — which has, as is to be expected, busied itself very little with the systematic application of close reading.

II

As Yvor Winters has pointed out, *The Scarlet Letter* may be seen in at least one light as an illustration of the Puritan drama viewed at a distance of two centuries — viewed, that is, through the glasses that two centuries ground. The point at which the drama is engaged has not so much to do with Puritan concepts of sin (for the adultery which touches off the book is wadded up into the semblance of a postulate — it becomes in Kenneth Burke's language part of the "scene" rather than a component "act") as with the dilemma, peculiar to a theology founded upon an authoritarian and whimsical notion of deity, of how the elite (the "elect") may be reliably distinguished from the masses (the "unregenerate") in the absence of any unequivocal labels. In a political sense, church membership acts as the visible criterion, much as a party membership does in a one-party state: but on what basis are persons to be admitted to church membership? "By what signs shall ye know them?" Inner conviction of regeneration or outward profession of virtue — Anne Hutchinson or Increase Mather? Both criteria are potential quicksands, for both are very susceptible of fraudulent employment, not to speak of honest misinterpretation. In the last analysis, of course, the decision rests with the elite so long as its power remains unquestioned: and from the first the elite in Massachusetts was dead set against the centrifugalism indicated by the "inner light" theory — "liberty" of conscience is a fine thing for a minority, but a luxury for a ruling class, especially where the subject in question is a frame of reference acceptance or rejection of which is held to be a matter of absolute importance. Deviationism becomes the cardinal crime against the state. For the rising entrepreneurial class which emerged in New England in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, this was a healthy attitude in the main, since by frowning on "anarchic individualism" it upheld the stability of the established order, and hence the sanctity of property. Yet on the other hand, the notion of an inward "illumination" could not be wholly repudiated, since by it alone could an *individual* be assured that he had become a recipient of "grace": to

him the external machinery of piety would, were it nothing but machinery, be inescapably false — he could not, as it were, "fool himself" into thinking he had been saved *unless* he "fooled himself" into thinking he had experienced "grace." Pragmatically speaking, the dilemma distilled itself into the method of relying upon professions of regeneration corroborated by the supporting evidences that the machinery of piety might supply. A double, yet unsatisfactory, check, it was the best that could be invented to meet an impossible situation.

Looked at in this perspective, Hawthorne's novel becomes a study in the ironies implicit in such a world, as well as in the peculiar personal ordeals which it entails: ironies and ordeals directly attributable to the fact that the business of distinguishing elite from mass is a *public* concern. It is of crucial importance to be able to know with reasonable certainty whether or not the man with whom you are rubbing elbows is of the Devil or of God, just as, in a one-party state, it is equally crucial to be able to identify the "spies" of the enemy. And, too, because this is so, the pressure against individual deviationists to regard their "crime" as a public offense, "confession" of which is as morally necessary as, say, the "confession" involved in going to a hospital for treatment of syphilis is in a culture where the "possession" of contagious microorganisms is the secular equivalent of "possession" by the Devil, — the pressure is far more intense than in a world in which "crime" is a manifestation of individualism to be defended, by concealment if necessary, from "the law." Hence the central importance of the scaffold in *The Scarlet Letter* both to Society, as figured by the crowds milling through the opening and closing chapters, and to the protagonists, Hester and Dimmesdale. The electric chair is a place where the anarchic personality can find it possible, to the last, to "hold together" by dramatizing its situation as "one man against society," society being represented by the reporters (the prurient eye) and the prison officials and clergy (the enraged father). The public scaffold offers the *opportunity* at least for the offender to make his peace with society in terms of a punishment which has a *personal* ritual significance for every member. The electric chair is a depersonalized engine of vengeance interposed *between* the offender and society, whereas the public scaffold is a dramatized engine of chastisement *linking* the offender and society.

Expiation, that is to say, being regarded as a social duty in such a society, the pressure upon "godly" persons who may have "fallen" is exceedingly intense indeed, far more so than upon individualists

whom the machinery of society leaves unintimidated. This is precisely Dimmesdale's position — the extreme possible position, of the man who is himself a judge of the qualifications of others being forced by his situation into doing what he habitually expects from them. He wants to eat his cake and have it too — to retain his position in society, a position of "holy whiteness," while simultaneously penalizing himself for his fall from grace. Legitimate ambition vies with the drive to confess: for he knows, what nobody else does, that the elite itself is poisoned by his fall. This is of course the most drastic irony of all, that the holier he becomes in all eyes but his own, Hester's and Chillingworth's, the more corrupt he is to himself. A model for the emulation of his "flock," the longer he permits them to emulate him the greater is his betrayal of their confidence. The irony is deepened when he chooses, as the moment to make confession, a moment at which his reputation can scarcely be conceived to be higher — when he is the darling of that crowd to which he confesses himself. It is a grandiose gesture, at the top of possible drama, and in that respect quite antithetical to the flagellations in his study — which fail of effect just because they are visible to no one but himself. They cannot satisfy the demands which his society has nurtured in him. Yet he cannot confess, even though the pressure to do so quite literally makes him a sick man, for reasons which may belong in the same class as those which inhibit Hamlet from killing the king: because he must maximize his drama, because he fears ostracism, because he is in love with suffering, because (even) he takes pride in the very ambiguity of his status. Whatever the precise nature of his inhibitions (Hawthorne never clarifies them for us, which may be a good thing), they sustain him for seven years, until he is at the summit of his personal prestige, and until he is offered for the first time the opportunity to escape his society in the company of the woman he has loved and the child whose father he is. At that instant, when to accept the "face of things" and escape would be to furnish his "conscience" (as Chillingworth's horror at his act indicates) with enough fuel to last it a good long time, by some curious paradox of inversion he rejects that luxury in favor of the still greater one of complying with the demands of his society. Confession, while it alienates him from his "flock" and makes escape a superfluity, in a larger sense, "brings him back" from the isolation in which he has been living, and makes death his only possible conclusion. Response to social demand at this point is a denial of selfhood, and hence a kind of suicide

— even, if I may push an analogy, an acceptance of castration, of which his ascetic self-discipline of the past seven years has been after all but an attenuated version, a prolonged "unmanning" of himself to placate God the Father, against whom the impiety was ultimately aimed. Of course, like suicide itself, the gesture is ambiguous: it can also be seen as the ultimate *assertion* of self.

If Dimmesdale's difficulty is that of objectifying his isolation, Hester's is that of accepting her own. For unlike his, her "fall from grace" has not been capable of concealment, and as the book ends with his confession, so it opens with her punishment. There is in fact a sustained contrapuntality in the relation of this woman and this man, developed with more or less consistency all through the book. He battles his socially acquired drive to confess; she battles, if anything, her "natural" impulses to rebel. He lives in secret, she in open, expiation; he in the geographical heart of the town, she on the farthest outskirts. He is effeminate and orthodox; she is intensely feminine and heterodox. One cannot imagine that, had the book been pushed back to the postulated adultery, the impulse toward it would have originated with him. She, of the dark hair and voluptuous figure, has done the worst of which a woman is capable: she has seduced a priest. And the measure of her strength is not that she puts on gray robes and becomes, in the Hawthorne tradition, a nurse to the sick — it is that, despite the public pressure exerted against her (for is she not at least one unequivocally defined "criminal," identifiable at a distance by her scarlet letter; one unambiguous scapegoat for a society that could never escape the haunting thought that all the faces to be seen were masks, as Young Goodman Brown in his apocalyptic vision saw it?), she does not repent. She suffers, as she must under such obloquy: but she does not capitulate. The "light and graceful foliage of her character" withers away, "leaving a bare and harsh outline"; her carnal beauty chills into marble repose; yet the inhibition is but temporary, and at the psychologically ripe moment, in the forest, all her sexual potency returns, once again to overwhelm the passive Dimmesdale. Her hair, so long suppressed, tumbles down over her shoulders, "dark and rich" and abundant: as the minister in spite of himself is a denier of life, so she in spite of herself remains a fertility-goddess, opposing to his Pauline Christianity her unyokable paganism. In a very real sense she is his mother, as truly as she is Pearl's: he is incapable, partly at least because unwilling, to save himself, by flight or by confession, and is galvanized into choosing only when she prods

him to it. Though he loves suffering, she does not: it is she who has the one vision vouchsafed them of a new life elsewhere: "We will have a home and a fireside of our own; and thou shalt sit upon his knee," she tells Pearl, "and he will teach thee many things, and love thee dearly." It is a vision that could come only to a woman, in Hester's situation, of great creativity. Dimmesdale, who, prior to her enunciation of it, has been thinking of himself as a "man whose knees are tottering beneath him," is so far "unmanned" that the vision makes him all but literally drunk, as his journey into the town shows. He is no longer able to respond to it as a *man,* but only as a *child.* His fate is in a sense prognosticated here: we cannot be surprised to see him, the following day, repudiate the vow he took with Hester in the forest, for children are expected to be irresponsible. It may even be that he plays his final scene as he does out of fear as much as anything — fear of Hester's power to give him life when what he wants is death. Her proposal is after all an offer of life, and an acceptance of deviation, acceptance of exile, all which she has long since schooled herself to, but which his insecure and paralytic self recoils from, once the initial fever has dwindled, in horror so pure as to impel him to take the opportunity of reconciling himself with his "true" mother, society. So, ironically again, by publicly "accepting" her he can escape her, and purchase, at her expense, his own redemption.

As for Chillingworth, he is the one superfluity in the book. It is true, as Matthiessen and others have argued, that he may be intended to represent the sin which Dante calls "losing the good of the intellect," being "diabolized," in Hawthorne's own word, by his achieved revenge, and as such to be put over against Hester and Dimmesdale, whose sin has been only carnal. But if this is so, Hawthorne has failed even more strikingly. Chillingworth is too much a piece of "machinery," a stage contrivance, to carry the persuasive weight which his status, in such a view demands. The stoop in his shoulders, the beard that almost touches the ground, the "glare of red light" that flickers in his eyes, to speak nothing of his abracadabra with roots and herbs, nor of the melodramatic way in which he goes about seeking his revenge — all these make it impossible to take him seriously. Hawthorne has manufactured a grotesque and asked us to take him as a person at the same level of existence as his two other protagonists. It is beyond question. Peter Quint, in "The Turn of the Screw," terrifies because he is *not* human but a real out-and-out ghost, and as such a very powerful symbol. The trouble with Chillingworth, as

with Rappaccini, Miriam's model, Westervelt, Dr. Grimshaw, Aunt Keziah, and other of Hawthorne's gothic characters, is that Hawthorne insists on their being accepted as human. Chillingworth's "degradation," such as it is, appears but feebly to us, and largely in terms of details of personal aspect — he *is* a demon because he *looks* like one, not the other way round, an unconvincing invocation of the pathetic fallacy. The opening paragraph of Chapter XV ("Hester and Pearl") gives away the game with its absurdities that are the more absurd if satirically intended: "And whither was he now going? Would he not suddenly sink into the earth, leaving a barren and blasted spot, where, in due course of time, would be seen deadly nightshade, dogwood, henbane . . . Or would he spread bat's wings and flee away, looking so much the uglier the higher he rose towards heaven?" It will not even wash to justify this sort of thing on the ground that Hawthorne, as in the case of Mistress Hibbins the witch-lady, is importing a flavor of seventeenth-century superstition into his book for "local color" purposes. As we see him, Chillingworth is compounded of little else but seventeenth-century superstition and nineteenth-century melodrama stirred up together: where Hawthorne's coyness anent him stops and his seriousness begins is incapable of determination. The coyness only breeds suspicion, adding nothing, in the case of Chillingworth as in that of Mistress Hibbins, concerning whom nothing is *stated,* but only *alleged.* And that little part of Chillingworth that is not superstition and melodrama is equally weak: he is the stock Hawthorne "scholar" seen only in retrospect, who, like Dimmesdale, has come under the charmed circle of Hester's vivifying power, and been forever warped from his course. Hester wonders "how she could ever have been wrought upon to marry him": and there is no explanation, apart from the triumphancy of power, for this conjunction of youth and age. The ineffectuality of Chillingworth in the book reflects Hawthorne's confusion as to just how much he was supposed to do. He is a man obsessed, but the obsession is shown to us masked as a grotesque, and the result is a reduction of meaning and power. Where the superstitions touch so nearly the core of the book, they cannot be treated with the arch superiority with which Hawthorne, measuring two hundred years, handles them, without enfeebling the book itself. They are, moreover, an important expression of the same kind of mind which habitually lived in the Puritan myth. The false historicism displayed by Hawthorne in the way he manipulates Chillingworth and Mistress Hibbins, extending as it does

less consistently seen as like a statue, a work of art. In the first eight chapters she is spoken of six times as "pedestaled," like a statue; and elsewhere she is a "statue of ignominy," "majestic and statue-like," "of marble quietude" and of "marble passiveness of brow." Chillingworth is said to have made of her a "marble image of happiness" — before she came to Dimmesdale. The impression she gives throughout, save for the scenes in the forest, is of a "marble coldness." What the community has done to her has made her frigid and repressed. The only inklings of her true nature are the "gorgeous" and "luxuriant" and "artistically done" Letter itself, and the clothes she makes for Pearl, of a "fanciful, or, we might rather say, a fantastic ingenuity" — a substitute, as it were, for passion, and also perhaps for poetry. Her true nature, like her needlework, is impulsive, sumptuous, warm.

As for Pearl, who is a "natural child," she is dealt with throughout the book in terms of an elaborate and subtly sustained pun. Rejecting the companionship of human children, she becomes intimate with growing things. "The spell of life went forth from her ever-creative spirit," says Hawthorne, and we are shown her in the scene between Hester and Chillingworth by the sea, playing in tide-pools with horseshoe crabs, jelly fish, seaweed and sea-birds; and in the forest scenes, she is given as garlanded with wildflowers and moving among wild animals without alarming them. In the final scenes of the book, too, "She ran and looked the wild Indian in the face, and he grew conscious of a nature wilder than his own." She tells John Wilson that her mother picked her off a rosebush, and while Chillingworth and Dimmesdale look on from above, she plays among the graves in the cemetery as if she were immune to death. Most often she is figured as a bird: "of scarlet plumage," "tropical," a "sea-bird," a "humming-bird," a bird of "bright plumage"; and she has a "bird-like" voice and "flies" "like a bird," or with "bird-like motion." But also she is likened to flowers, the northern lights, the day, a brook, a deer, a butterfly, a diamond, and sea-foam: all natural objects, bright, or growing, or flowing things. She has an affinity for the Letter, and parodies it in green sea-weed; is in behavior wild and untameable, and of an almost total moral innocence. Of Dimmesdale she has until the very end an instinctive suspicion.

Dimmesdale and Chillingworth are not so sharply handled from this point of view; yet provide some interesting clues. The worldly innocence and spiritual profundity of the minister are everywhere stressed: he is a "heaven-ordained apostle," an "angel" in speech and

action, a "miracle of holiness," and "of whitest sanctity." He is associated with whiteness, both by virtue of his own striking pallor and "white, lofty and impending brow," and by the bevies of white virgins in his "flock" (for he is a "shepherd," and so linked with whiteness that way too) who have enshrined his image in their bosoms. He is, too, a kind of lamp, whose light is the Word of God: he fasts and prays to "keep the grossness of this earthly state from clogging and obscuring his spiritual lamp." Men fear that his "dawning light would be extinguished, all untimely"; and at the end, his great sermon is spoken of as "words of flame" and a "shower of golden truths." And the physician, besides being figured as a demon, is a miner, a geometrician and an engineer: he goes "deep" into Dimmesdale; he "delves," "probes," and "burrows" "like a treasure-seeker in a dark cavern"; he "dug into the poor clergyman's heart, like a miner searching for gold," makes "long search into the minister's dim interior" — a logical thing to do since, as he himself observes, secrets, in the popular phrase, lie "buried" in the heart. As geometrician, he sets out to study Dimmesdale like a "geometrical problem"; and as engineer, he knows "the spring that controlled the engine" of the minister's nature; he brings a "terrible machinery to bear" upon him; and "tampers" with "the delicate springs" of his mind and conscience.

The tropes suggest that the casting of Dimmesdale as a priest and Chillingworth as a physician (i.e., as an empirical scientist) was not altogether chance or convenience: especially not if the emphasis upon Hester as an artist in her own right and a work of art by default, and upon Pearl as a child of "nature," is also adduced at this point. Hawthorne, who had himself, or suspected himself of having, a strong streak of the Peeping Tom *(vide* such sketches as "Sunday Morning," "Sights From a Steeple," "Main Street," "Footprints On the Seashore," and so on), nourished a deep antipathy against the scientist, who, he apparently felt, tended also to be a Peeping Tom, in whom the "head" had outrun the "heart," and who maintained himself at an unassailable distance from mankind not out of necessity but choice: a detached intellectual, that is to say, an undigestible lump in the hot esophagus of the body politic. This antipathy manifested itself in a tendency to equate the scientist with the necromancer, the alchemist, — in a word, with the quack, and to represent him as always engaged in doing what Chillingworth is said to have done: violating, "in cold blood, the sanctity of a human heart." So with Chillingworth, so with Ethan Brand, with Rappaccini, and with Aylmer, not to speak

of Holgrave and, in a different way, Peter Hovenden of "The Artist of the Beautiful." And it may be that the interplay of the personages of *The Scarlet Letter* is interpretable in terms of the relations Hawthorne conceived as existing among art, nature, religion, and science. A close relation between art and science, it might be inferred from the relation between Hester and Chillingworth, is sterile, productive of calamity, and as preposterous as the union of extreme youth and old age. A close relation between science and religion resembles that between Dimmesdale and Chillingworth in that it becomes an effort on the part of science to penetrate, expose, and reduce to its own terms the concepts of religion — a destructive, insidious relation. And a close relation between art and religion tends, as Hester tends with Dimmesdale, to secularize the latter. It is a relation essentially "adulterous," since its end-product (as figured by Pearl) is a kind of adulteration, like watered milk. Pearl's essential amorality might then be taken as an indication of the dominance of "creative" over "redemptive" power — since she has almost nothing that is recognizably Dimmesdale's in her, and is explicitly drawn as "wild" and "natural" *and* dressed up by Hester's *art*. Apparently, too, she becomes in time a "great lady" of society — than which it is difficult to imagine anything more contrived, and therefore the produce of art. Art is life-giving, careless of ordinary law, and young; but science is life-destroying, hypocritical and impotent as age. Yet both are dangerous, being hostile to the religious impulse which, itself feeble and insecure in an increasingly secular age, becomes their combined victim and saves itself only by an heroic effort of integrity at the last moment.

Such a reading as this may be only fanciful, though the book does incline to bear it out. As his other books indicate, Hawthorne was certainly both fascinated and repelled by his "dark ladies" (all whom, incidentally, are artists of one sort or another); and the apotheosis of Dimmesdale upon the scaffold is certainly intended as an unequivocal spiritual "victory" for him, a "victory" which is almost as unequivocally a repudiation of whatever Hester stands for. There may be hints here, substantially supported at other points in Hawthorne's writing, of a strong ambivalence in his attitude toward his own craft, alternately, or even simultaneously, of pride and of guilt: an ambivalence, moreover, that never was finally resolved, and may have contributed something to his spectacular physiological and artistic disintegration during the Civil War. But to enter a discussion of such a theory would be, from the immediate context, to deviate too far.

HARRISON PAUL PORTER:

The Snakecharmer: A Fable

"Come and see, all come and see. Here is a serpent, a venomous snake. He has two deadly fangs, both filled with death. I will teach him innocence, make him meek to my will. Come and see, all come and see, come and see. . . ."

The singsong aroused the bored townspeople. "A snakecharmer," they cried; and they ran through the streets and alleys of their little village, their wooden sabots clopping on the cobblestones and their hair flying: children, men, women, and dogs, and even a skinny, bristly pig or two jerked along by a rope about a hock — all converged on the square, shouting and barking, laughing and squealing and scuffling their feet until the air was filled with dust hanging in the sun, a haze of gold shot through with the white pigeons that darted in every direction.

". . . . a serpent, a venomous snake. . . ."

No matter how each shouted as he ran along the street, when he drew up to the crowd in the square he became perfectly quiet . . . oh, some noise was made, all exclaimed in chorus after everything the snakecharmer said, but not loudly; and they were not only very quiet but very still. Now and then someone would rise slowly upon his toes and stretch his neck above the others like a crane, but most of them stood as motionless as the dusty leaves that drooped above their heads in the summer heat.

"He has two deadly fangs. . . ."

"Ahhhhh," the crowd sighed amorously.

". . . both filled with death."

"Ahhhhh," they sighed again, hugging themselves, deliciously chilled. A young man leaned and brushed against a young girl, his eyes gleaming at her sidewise, and she, excited by the snake and the charmer, leaned and brushed back.

A priest, whose face was square and fat and whiskery, and streamed with sweat that dripped off his little round hard knot of a chin, sailed grandly down the street and nuzzled his way through the crowd with his big stomach; he beamed and tangled his fat pink fingers in the rusty hair of a shoemaker's apprentice, and then he changed his staff

from his right to his left hand and reached out and pinched the bottom of a housewife who stood before him. When this good woman turned on him, her hair standing out like the skirt of a gypsy dancer, so sharply did she whirl, and her thick fist above her head in the sunshine like a hammer, he just smiled on her, that was all. He tilted his head to one side and smiled sweetly, drops of moisture trembling on his upper lip; and when he lifted a hand, the palm toward her and two fingers raised, and speaking like a church organ said, "Que le bon Dieu te benisse," she lowered her fist and meekly moved aside two steps, smiling at him and frowning at the people she stepped on, all at the same time, until he could stand in the front row of the circle.

He then could see a tall slouched man with all his bones poking at the skin like tent poles, a long scraggy yellow-brown face, and tan sunken eyes, glazed and blood-red in the corners, as though he had stared too long into a light. He had long bony arms, whose veins and arteries stood out under the flimsy skin, long slender yellow hands, and ragged hair that hung down a tall bony forehead. "I will teach him innocence, make him meek to my will," the melancholy mouth chanted to the treetops; and the lids dropped slowly over the weary eyes.

The priest saw a boy, thinner than the man, even; with dark, enormous eyes gazing from sharp sockets that sawed at the skin pulled back into his head, dragged by the sunken eyes. Sticks for arms and twigs for fingers, frail and brittle. There are bits of leaves and straw in his hair. Will he do tricks, perhaps? Or can he twist himself into complicated knots, his legs about his neck, a kiss pressed to his own elbow? Oh, last month there was the cleverest boy who did all these things, and danced in bells as well; but this child clearly is going to do nothing, he is going to stand there dying of the round black smudges on each cheek, and holding a basket to collect contributions. . . . The priest was sorry: he had so enjoyed the contortionist last month. A kiss on his very own elbow — he had smacked distinctly, rolled his eyes at the crowd, slyly, and unwound himself and slowly tied his arms and legs into another kind of knot. But nothing again like that kiss. . . . Imagine! *his own elbow. . . . !*

Then he saw the snake, scrawled like a sign on the earth. It stirred feebly in the hot, pale dust, and the man pounded a stick before its pointed nose twice, chanting, and the crowd sighed again. "Come and see, all come and see. Here is the serpent. . . . " Suddenly the man lifted up the snake on the end of the stick. "Regardez! A serpent! Venomous! Fanged! Deadly!" It dangled, and the

people worried that it might be dead, but he assured them it had only been charmed; if they didn't believe him, then he would show them, so he shook the stick and the sick snake opened its mouth and hissed weakly, wriggled a little and began to slide from the stick. "Ahhhhh!" cheered the people. The charmer flicked out a hand and grasped the snake behind the head.

And now he passed around the circle, his head thrown back and his Adam's apple moving rhythmically up and down in his throat as he sang his chant, and the people, instead of falling back, leaned forward, and he waved the snake before their very faces, all around the circle. The performance was over. Or rather, it was necessary to begin from the beginning again. He flung the snake down in the dust, where it lay in a slack green curve, moving neither tail nor tongue. "Here is a serpent," the man chanted, and the little boy in his shabby costume, stiffly, as though he had no joints in his bones, paced from spectator to spectator holding out his basket for coins. Around the circle, and back to his place, where he stood on one foot, his head sunk on one shoulder, and his eyes in his sad peaked face staring at the ground.

". . . . ahhh," sighed the crowd. ". . . . two deadly fangs," intoned the snakecharmer.

So he started around another time, holding the dying reptile pinched in its middle. The people bent forward, their eyes damp and bright and their tongues resting between their lips. All at once the snake reared its head in a tiny sweeping movement, and its tongue flickered, ever so softly, against the cheek of one of the women.

Now this woman saw the tiny head sway toward her with its bright eyes upon her and felt the satiny touch of its cool, forked tongue and she straightened up and began screaming as loudly as she could, as regularly as the breath that came and went in her body. Her eyes turned glassy and rolled their whites outward, slowly, and she got stiff and hard and blue and toppled to the ground. The little girl by her side began to wail, the dogs began to bark, and in the center of the circle, much smaller now that the people began to push about, the ragged boy, his eyes like round black pits, stared at the woman. As if he had been longing to sit down for years, and had been unable to, he sank to the ground, and squeezing his ankles with his hands, he began to weep, his face relaxed at last and tears pouring around his open mouth.

They are the devil, shouted the priest, shaking his staff in the air.

They are the devil, the crowd shouted, and before one could say, No they aren't, either, they had convinced themselves that they had at bay, if not the devil (who would want to kill *him?*), then somebody very close to him: and they fell upon the man and the boy with their bare hands, and tore them limb from limb.

The slender green snake, meanwhile, slid away over the dust and disappeared. Miraculously, he was not stepped on, though the people were stamping and leaping where the blood of the man and boy was spilt, driven out of their minds into an ecstasy and waving scraps of cloth, some even torn from their own garments.

As for the woman, she was laid on a table, her hands folded over her breasts and a lighted candle placed in them, and the priest began to give her the last rites, in the middle of which she sat up suddenly and began screaming exactly as before. The people were amazed and declared it was a miracle, and when, after some trouble, they calmed the woman with bleedings, they asked her questions about the other world in which she had for a short time been: and hesitating only now and then to remember more clearly, she gave them answers for all their questions and, with perfect serene confidence in her right to have been there, many surprising details about Paradise.

Lucy and Vincent: A Grotesque

The door opened, and closed, and opened and closed again and again, people came in, and before long it was a party. Everyone sat on cushions of blue and white scattered on the polished floor and drank fermented honey drinks out of little silver goblets and blew pale smoke through their noses. Thin slices of black, salty ham, from wild boars killed in the mountains, were served on black honey bread; and all the delicate red tables, hardly inches high, had silver dishes on them, filled with figs dipped in brandy, and strawberries frosted with sugar and almond powder; and there were nuts for every taste. Now and then someone rose and strolled across the room and sat down again, and from another part of the room someone else would come to sit on the vacated cushion: then Lucy arrived and the arrangement was locked.

When Lucy arrived, the unoccupied cushion was in a corner where only one person sat, a slight man with cropped hair and bitter lips. Sitting there, painting nervous whirlicues upon the thin air with his

thumb, he looked rather like an intelligent convict.

What an extraordinary portrait, Lucy said, dropping down. I see the resemblance, of course, but you are cruel to yourself. For instance, she said, her remarkably beautiful eyes widening, you have painted your ears like wilted elm leaves, and you have the finest ears I have ever seen, and I particularly always notice ears. They seem forever unfinished, a little folded yet and in the process of becoming, like buds, and so hold more of the possible.

This was clearly what is known as making drawing-room conversation, and it was followed by a silence. Well, she said simply, at last, well, I am Lucy, and I have always thought I should like to be a saint. At the moment, though, she said, folding her hands in her lap and watching enchanted while with his thumb he deepened the hollows under his cheekbones in the thin air, I am merely Lucy.

I am Vincent, he replied, without taking his eyes from his work, and I paint. And I wish I were not here, I despise parties, he said abruptly, turning to her for the first time. And there he was, his hand suspended in the middle of a whirlicue, looking into those eyes I shall not even try to describe. Nor do I pretend to know how those things happen, so enough to say they were instantly, rapturously, in love, and for the rest of that magical evening, which neither had looked forward to the least bit, they talked romantic nonsense, she about his ears, and he about her eyes.

The next day each received a little box, Lucy one from Vincent, and Vincent one from Lucy. Lucy's from Vincent, she was told, was electric blue with a curiously twisted ribbon of chrome yellow and brilliant green; and Vincent's from Lucy was white tied with white satin ribbon, with a sprig of white lilac tucked under the bow. Vincent, you must have guessed by now, had sent Lucy his ears; and Lucy, I need hardly tell you, had sent Vincent her two remarkably beautiful eyes.

Love will not be outdone. Vincent, unable to eat or sleep or paint until he had Lucy for his very own, so wounded was he by Cupid's arrows, sent off in the next mail a leg; Lucy in turn sent him her ears, neatly boxed; and when the courtship began seriously, they never met without some little sentimental gift for each other, a toe or nose or some such thing.

Well, they finally were married, and a good thing too, for no telling where it all would have ended had they gone on: as it was, they could only sit opposite one another, and their married life, indeed their life

altogether, consisted of a harmony of their strongly beating hearts.

Year in, year out, sitting there in this mystical union, the vibrations of two beating hearts each echoed perfectly in the other. And then, and then one day the faintest break in the dear tempo. It was soon distinct, undeniable: the hearts in the trimmed figures of Vincent and Lucy were *not* beating in harmony! The rhythms bumped and collided, the once beautiful vibrations dinned like forks and knives and pans all thrown together . . . it was hideous.

Who knows which heart to hold the blame? Was it Lucy's, beating a little faster? Or Vincent's, beating a little slower? Or was it the other way about? The death of love is as mysterious as its birth, and I do not pretend to understand this either.

But I know Vincent had withheld from Lucy an arm and an eye, and began to paint again immediately.

And Lucy took up where she had left off becoming a saint, and became one.

Traitor! each thought, parting from the other; but neither suffered, for they were creatures of advanced spirituality, and each believed himself without blemish or blame in the matter. Generous as only those of intact pride can be, each found it within himself to forgive the perfidy of the other.

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C. W. M. JOHNSON:

Complex Work

WILLIAM EMPSON: *The Structure of Complex Words.* New Directions.

Empson's new book incorporates into a typically elaborate kind of organization several essays published elsewhere over the past fifteen years. Over half of the book is new, and the older material has in general been rewritten, expanded, and supported in a way that has made some of the slighter performances now genuinely imposing. The book is a complex one; Empson says he is "writing on the borderland of linguistics and literary criticism," and he might have risked wrecking his metaphor by naming symbolic logic, ethics, and the history-of-ideas as well. It is easy to speculate that the need for such a study was suggested by difficulties the author encountered in teaching Oriental students the nuances of meaning in certain English words. Certainly the technique of paraphrasing so elaborately developed and abundantly illustrated would have special usefulness in meeting this difficulty. But the main concern of the book is with problems of a different order; Empson has obviously been worrying over some pat solutions to the problem of poetry and belief and the problem of "pseudo-statements," and, above all, over the radically reductive classing of literature as "mere emotive expression" (a trick of certain analytic philosophers, not all of whom are "positivists"). The program is a noble one — to restore literature to a position of respect by reaffirming the importance of its cognitive content and, indeed, finding an unrecognized source of such content in those words which carry a "compacted doctrine."

How successfully the program has been carried out may be a subject of dispute for some time. The author will be accused, as in the past, of overreading, but I should like to point out that his soundest contributions as a critic have been innovations in method; if his reading in a particular case must be rejected, the correction will nonetheless have to be supplied within the framework he has designed.

Some account of that framework is necessary. Empson has tried to show that, except for a few yelps and swearwords, emotive expressions carry their own concealed propositions. The criterion of complexity, however, is not that the word stress an emotion but that it carry a "compacted doctrine"; that is, that it be "able to direct opinion" through various kinds of "interactions between Senses (including Implications)." In *Seven Types* Empson had left open the question of whether or not the ambiguity was "intended" and seemed at times to be blaming (or praising) language for not being clear; here he deals with "the idea of a double meaning which is intended to be fitted into a definite structure." The first two chapters provide an elaborate machinery for clarifying this structure. Of these I find Chapter 1, which sets up a method of charting a word's meanings, clear enough; but the fine-drawn distinctions in Chapter 2 among four (or is it five?) types of equations in words I find as ungraspable as the distinctions among the seven types of ambiguity were hard to retain. A reader

is likely to begin to feel that the central thesis is less important than what is said by the way. The chapters devoted to analyses of single works, though doggedly focused upon "key words," fortunately manage to proceed pretty independently of this machinery.

The words which especially interest Empson are those which have undergone rather frequent shifts of meaning and acquired a set of sharply contrasted definitions and both honorific and derogatory uses. Most of them are employed in defining rather intricate social relationships; and the five chapters devoted to "honest" and "dog" taken together provide a remarkable survey of the "individualist tradition" during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Empson has always had a sensitive nose for evidence in literature of class feeling and social stratification. A valuable by-product of this interest in the social nuances of words is the chance it gave him to explore *as historian* the period attitudes toward certain problems — cuckoldry, sexual laxity, and the like — and to clarify as well certain problems of practical morality. I find particularly stimulating Empson's criticism of the moral judgments of certain literary men, notably A. C. Bradley, G. Wilson Knight, and Thomas Hardy.

The most rewarding parts of *Complex Words,* however, are the four full-scale analyses of Shakespearean plays *(Lear, Timon, Othello,* and *Measure for Measure).* Empson has always been at his best on Shakespeare, whose method of composition consistently plays into his hands. (Cp. J. Dover Wilson: "When [Shakespeare] used a word, all possible meanings of it were commonly present to his mind, so that it was like a musical chord which might be resolved in whatever fashion or direction he pleased.") It is a great advance in Empson's procedure here that he *carries through* with his verbal analyses and, in the case of the three great plays, employs his findings in settling some of the main controversies. The chapter on *Othello* incorporates "The Best Policy" *(ca.* 1937), and thus gets off to a start with an exploration of the conspicuous key words "honest" and "honesty." Having established Iago as a type of the "Independent Man" Empson takes into account social tensions that were unquestionably present and develops a very convincing description of the reaction of Shakespeare's firstnight audience to Iago (up to a point, they liked him). Turning his attention to the work of the scholar-critics, he briefly disposes of Schücking ("It is wilful to put up a struggle to make the author stupider than he appears . . .") and devotes a long final section to rescuing the play from the studies of Stoll. Specifically under attack is Stoll's account of the inconsistencies and unrealities in the characterization of hero and villain ("Perhaps I am a bad judge of inconsistency, because it seems to me that few writers have dared to make people as eccentric as they really are . . ."). The defense is too intricately worked out to lend itself to summary, but to my own way of thinking Rymer and his followers have now been answered.

Measure for Measure gets considerable clarification without emerging as so perfect a play. Empson's deft handling of the moral issues of the work helps explain why we are so drawn to it, without working toward the uncritical kind of wholehearted acceptance Knight and Leavis advocate. Empson interprets the evidence of confused intentions in this play to indicate that Shakespeare may well have started out to write a Morality, but that he "found he did not like his saints when he had got them."

Some of the most valuable parts of these critical chapters — the attack on the historical realists, the general estimate of *Measure for Measure,* the passage on religion in *Lear* — have only a very tenuous relation to the business of complex words. So also for many another passage included because it will be of interest to the sort of people who read the book — the account of what to do about "Beauty is truth, truth beauty" and how to answer the "every man is entitled to his own opinion" argument (p. 421), for instance. In fact, there is every sign that if Empson could bring himself to focus upon some larger critical issue and produce a book less narrowly concerned with pushing to extremes a minor obsession with semantics, he would do much to efface his reputation as an eccentric. Perhaps he likes that reputation, but in the best parts of *Complex Words* there is a rationality, a maturity of critical judgment, that ought to be given freer play.

It will take ten years to consolidate the gains of the book; but whether Empson's "little bits of machinery" will prove useful in any of the techniques of philosophical analysis seems at this time doubtful. There a more rigorous kind of clarification is required. In an appendix on "Theories of Value" Empson underlines this fact by confusing throughout the necessary distinction between meta-ethics and ethics and attempting to settle both questions at once, for he obviously believes that theories about the meaning of ethical terms also make ethical recommendations. He treats C. L. Stevenson as an "advocate of the Emotive view" rather than a proponent of the autobiographical theory of the meaning of ethical terms, a position which, unlike the other, is at least tenable. He wishes to maintain that ethical statements correspond to something in the external world, but he can never decide quite what. It seems, at least, not to be the attitude of the speaker, which on Mr. Stevenson's view is the only likely candidate. Empson brings against Stevenson the usual charge of the non-naturalist: he fails to define "attitudes"; but as Empson accepts the psychological definition Richards has given, he is in a good position to understand the word. Since a careful examination of the results of Empson's paraphrases of emotive words throughout the work will show that the statements he finds in them are motivational-directional (as Empson says, they are "able to direct opinion"), Stevenson's position has actually been supported and not damaged. Empson maintains against Stevenson that "You do not solve any problem by favoring one bit of grammar rather than another." Yet it would seem that problems of definition are always solved in this way, that the grammar of symbolic logic has solved still other sorts of linguistic problems in this way, and that if we had to take this statement seriously it would invalidate Empson's whole method of solving even the purely literary problems of emotive language.

W. R. MOSES:

Pound's Worth

HUGH KENNER: *The Poetry of Ezra Pound.* New Directions.

To choose a polite figure, Pound's *Cantos* stand in the contemporary literary landscape rather like Donne's hill of Truth in its unspecified landscape: huge, craggy, and steep, not to be climbed easily, if climbed at all. Of course one need not attempt it, and is perfectly free to consider it a regrettable excrescence. There it is, though, bulky and largely unmapped, hard to ignore completely. Some consider mountaineering the only sport, but even among such people there is difference of opinion about techniques, and it may be hard for the plains-dweller to make out who reached the top and who didn't. Mr. Kenner is a convinced mountaineer. His study is intended to tell a selected group of neophytes enough about methods to let them get up themselves, and enough about the rewards of climbing to make them want to get up. (Here let's abandon the figure.)

The Poetry of Ezra Pound is an exposition explicitly intended for those who can manage Eliot and Joyce, but don't "get" Pound. The limitation deserves notice; it is very doubtful that anyone who doesn't believe he appreciates contemporary literature anyhow up to the level of difficulty of *The Waste Land* and *Ulysses* can derive or will feel like deriving much profit from this book. I am afraid that, to spare himself annoyance, the reader needs to be strongly prejudiced in Pound's favor, too: many people feel oppressed when told they are in the presence of a master who never never never made a slip, and Mr. Kenner apparently feels that Pound never did. (Other writers, and critics and teachers, make slips enough to go around.) Also, the reader has to be or become inured to the more perplexing aspects of contemporary critical vocabulary.

The annoyances that stem from its author's devotee-ism apart, *The Poetry of Ezra Pound* is a useful and praiseworthy book. It is full of facts about Pound's opinions and principles (largely given as gists of or excerpts from the prose works), and of analyses of portions of the poetry, that can aid one very materially to "get" Pound. The gloss of "Mauberley" seems especially good. Mr. Kenner's information is extensive; and it will be a long time, probably, before we have too much simple factual information about Pound, a long time before such information gets out of balance and hinders critical appreciation instead of helping it.

Incongruously, Mr. Kenner seems shame-faced about committing to paper the very information most likely to give well-meaning readers a boost into Pound. (If we admit that Pound is "difficult," that is; and we might as well.) The proposition that paraphrase isn't poetry is so deeply branded into him that he looks guiltily over his shoulder every time he whispers a bit of explication. "The man who has to be supplied with the denotations of *all* the words on the page before he can make a start is making no distinction between a poem and a crossword puzzle," he declares. He stresses heavily the idea that Pound works with the "rendering" (presenting, rather than explaining) and juxtaposition of facts, or words as *mimesis* of facts — understanding those terms as *synonyms,* ap-

parently — and would like to feel that ordinary exegesis of the words or facts, that is, relating them for purposes of identification to any words or facts except others in the poem, is nonsense. Without believing any more than Mr. Kenner does that paraphrase is poetry, I find this anti-explication attitude insufferably boring. To argue it seems fatuous, but if one wants to argue it, he can do it by quoting Mr. Kenner. About the languages other than English that occur in the *Cantos:* "One need *not* know them all, though in this as in other matters the more one knows, the sharper one's apprehension." About the materials of the *Cantos,* Pound is within his rights in expecting the reader to know Homer, Dante, and Ovid, and "The rest, for the careful reader, is *there on the page,* enough, that is, to keep whole passages from going utterly blank." About metaphor: "Poetic organization demands at least some tenuity of connection between discordant items; the mind is helpless before absolute disparity." Of course I am up to that unfair trick of quoting out of context, but enough of the kind of thing I have quoted (and enough explication) keeps cropping up in *The Poetry of Ezra Pound* to make me feel that Mr. Kenner's working principles are not in accord with his show principles; and that, as an interesting corollary, he wrote a better book than he thought he intended to. One more point: Mr. Kenner disagrees strongly with those who feel that the *Cantos* ought to have a plot. He says in effect that six months after one has read a play by Shakespeare, one's "sense of its vital reality" consists in recollection of a few major images, vivid juxtapositions. "And the fact that *Lear* or *Henry IV* survives in the mind as a pattern of major images suggests that . . . a sequential linkage between successive scenes might as well be scrapped without detriment to poetic logic. This, of course, is what is done in the *Cantos* . . ." Grant yourself the right premises, and naturally you come up with the right conclusion. I don't believe the *Cantos* need a plot either, but if I did, I wouldn't change my mind because of reasoning like that.

Mr. Kenner quotes approvingly a prose passage in which Pound says that when something is wrong with art, it isn't wrong with art only. He quotes, with similar appearance of approval, another in which Pound praises Confucius for directing his thinking toward the well-being of the whole community, and disparages the Greek thinkers for playing a polite intellectual game for the benefit of a select few only. He says that Pound has two key insights ("failure to grasp which has perhaps more than anything else debarred perfectly willing readers from access to the *Cantos*"), and one of them is the relation of politics to letters. Yet he nowhere gets down to a humble and prosaic job on the question of Pound's economics and politics. However bored he and we feel with Mr. Hillyer and the SRL, probably he ought to, or someone ought to.

Goodness knows, *The Poetry of Ezra Pound* is a book in reading which one had better not forget the principle of *caveat emptor.* But fortunately that does not mean there is nothing worth buying in it; there is a great deal.

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